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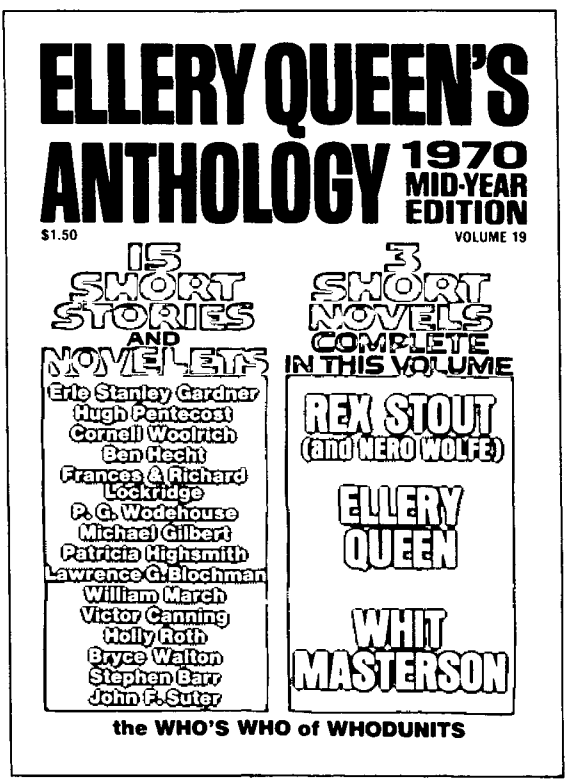

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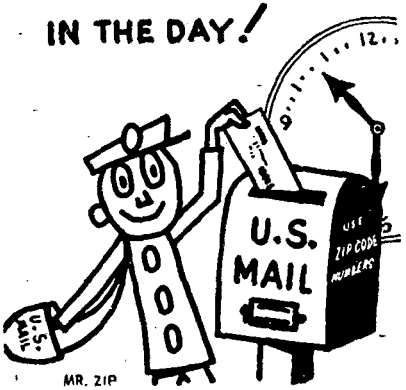

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Winner of FIRST PRIZE *in the* CWA *contest*

H. R. F. KEATING

Here are the names of the winning authors and the titles of their prize-winning stories in the Crime Writers Association contest sponsored by EQMM last year:

FIRST PRIZE
H. R. F. Keating's *The Old Shell Collector*

SPECIAL AWARD
Christianna Brand's *The Scapegoat*

SECOND PRIZES
P. D. James's *Murder, 1986*
Celia Fremlin's *Don't Be Frightened*
Pierre Audemars' *The Ring and the Square*

In this issue we bring you the First Prize Winner—H. R. F. Keating's *The Old Shell Collector*—a solidly satisfying detective novelet by the creator of Inspector Ghote of the Bombay C.I.D. Mr. Keating has invented a brand-new detective character, Mr. Peduncle, proprietor of a Shell Museum founded many years ago (in 1910) at an English seaside resort. Old Mr. Peduncle is the perfect armchair detective, since he is permanently confined to a wheel chair which he maneuvers with surprising dexterity; but while he can't use his legs, he can use his eyes, ears, and brain with a kind of scientific precision.

You see, old Mr. Peduncle, forced to be a sedentary sleuth, has developed his own special 'tec techniques, which he applies with equal care to the sorting and classifying of shells and to the sorting and classifying of clues. He believes that "systematic study in any field of knowledge is always worthwhile"—even, of course, in the detection of murder. His "process" is to observe first and then to make minute comparisons—and by identifying the "variations" to discover the truth.

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We sincerely hope that Mr. Keating will turn Mr. Peduncle into a series detective for readers of EQMM. For after all, to quote from "The New York Times" of August 3, 1969, "Collecting seashells is one of man's oldest pastimes"—and (unfortunately) detecting murders is also one of man's oldest pastimes . . .

THE OLD SHELL COLLECTOR

by H. R. F. KEATING

THEY MADE THEIR PRESENCE felt down there on the beach from the moment they arrived. Not that it was a scene of intense solitude and quiet beforehand. There were children running up and down the dark wet sand shouting and calling. More than one mother was trying to make some toddler return to the family encampment without herself getting up off the beach towel spread over the pebbles which the now receding tide had not reached; and all this required a good deal of increasingly irritated yelling. There was also a game of cricket being played, a tense affair in which a boy of seven or eight was standing worriedly in front of a set of bright yellow plastic stumps while his thick-waisted father strove at the bowling end to revive younger days; and this naturally resulted in more and more sharply uttered words floating up into the August air. So it was not really a tranquil scene.

But there were areas of comparative quiet. There was, for instance, a row of deck chairs drawn up just underneath the rust-stained concrete wall of the promenade where it was thought the sharp breeze would not strike with quite as much force as elsewhere; and here a number of elderly citizens grimly sat, the men wrestling with windteased newspapers, their spouses mostly knitting away for dear life, one or two determined souls actually succeeding in dozing in the illusory warmth of the sun.

It was one of these half-sleeping gentlemen, the oldest probably of the whole deck-chair row, who received the brunt of the arrival.

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With a wild outburst of whooping they came tearing along the half-deserted front sending the staid gulls wheeling and crying; and, for some reason or other, when they got to the exact point underneath which the old gentleman was letting the late hours of his life glide harmlessly away, the girl who happened to be in front of the racing jostling mob elected to jump down onto the beach. She gave a piercing shriek, echoing out even above the noise the rest of them were making, and took off with long slim legs held together aiming for some point on the stony beach below.

And the tips of her outstretched toes just brushed against the flat white cap that protected the old man's head from the sun. They sent the incongruously jaunty piece of headgear spinning and rolling over the pebbles and put the old boy into a state of alarm which the sight of the rest of the crowd jumping one by one onto the beach on either side of him did nothing to dispel.

The girl who had landed first took a look at the flinching octogenarian and turned quickly away. Evidently she was not the type to brazen out any such accident that occurred in her rackety progress about her world. But others of the party—there were no more than eight of them in fact, though to the quiet folk on the beach it must have seemed as if scores of the vandals had descended—were more hard-faced. Another of the girls, a pert-figured redhead in a saucily diminutive green bikini, turned to the boy beside her and commented on the incident in a voice which rang round the whole beach.

"They shouldn't let 'em out that old," she shouted cheerfully. "It's enough to make you sick just seeing them."

And then with a renewed full-throated whoop she set off leaping over the pebbles toward the somewhat more inviting area of the dark water-gleaming sand.

Once down on the sand the newcomers proceeded brazenly to take over the whole area. They ran races from end to end of the level stretch, and woe betide anyone foolish enough to remain in their way. They indulged in short games sessions with an enormous brightly colored rubber ball they had brought with them, bouncing it once right onto the carefully laid-out sandwich boxes and thermos bottles of a family eating an early lunch. And all the while they kept up a running commentary on their own activities delivered at the tops of their voices and interspersed with braying inconsequential laughter.

So bit by bit the whole of the sand was given over to them, mothers sharply calling their children back onto the pebbles, mid-

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dle-aged fathers darting furious glances at the mob but equally withdrawing to places that were safer, if a good deal more uncomfortable.

Only one determined parent, father of two small boys and a girl, resolutely refused to budge. He was engaged on serious business. From the moment the sea had retreated beyond the pebbles he had been busy constructing an immensely elaborate sand castle. With the aid of their little pails his children had been dragooned into amassing a sufficient quantity of sand while he himself, equipped, not with any plastic seaside spade, but with a proper no-nonsense garden tool, had toiled manfully to dig out a foot-deep trench all round the area of his proposed edifice. Once or twice as the crowd of newcomers had run whooping and shrieking past he had looked up briefly and a quick frown of annoyance had shown itself on his dedicatedly intense face above the sober pair of spectacles which rested as firmly on the bridge of his nose here on the beach as they did at his office desk.

And as was almost inevitable, before long these two parties staking claim to the sand, each determined in a different way, came into conflict.

It was the girl who had first jumped down onto the beach who was responsible. Jacky they called her, yelling insults at her in their friendly and thoroughly uninhibited way. She must have been about 17 by the look of her, certainly no more. And it was in the course of one of their brief but violent games with the big rubber ball—a heavy object some two feet in diameter—that the incident occurred.

Jacky was standing just above the newly built sand castle which its architect was busy giving a final shaping to, not without sharply reproving advice to his underlings, and the ball had come bouncing along toward her. She made a dash for it, swerved when it bounced askew, and went sprawling frankly spread-eagled right over the delicate structure. In an instant it was reduced from fantasty to flattened nothingness.

She heaved herself up on her elbows and looked across at her companions.

"Oh, God," she shouted, "I've got sand all down inside my bikini!"

And since this time she could hardly pretend she had not been responsible for the damage, she entirely ignored it. She pushed herself to her knees, digging two deep pits in the soft sand by way of final insult added to injury, then staggered upright and ran down toward the sea pulling the bikini top away from her body and shimmying wildly to get rid of the sand.

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"You've spoiled our castle," exclaimed its builder looking at her retreating back. "You've made a complete mess of it!"

None of the group paid the least attention to him. Jacky was for the time being the focus of their interest. The four boys rushed up and eagerly surrounded her, beginning vigorous and by no means disinterested efforts to help her get rid of more sand.

This activity, as might have been expected, drew a great deal of covert interest from the holidaymakers on the pebbly area. They had all been pretending to ignore the usurpers, but nonetheless they had kept a constant eye on their activities; and by now they had some idea of their different personalities and which name to attach to each of them. And they watched with relished disapproval while Mike, the blatantly handsome and self-assured one, Bob the blond muscle-boy, the serious-looking Herbert, who had already raised more than one chorus of strident booing by perpetrating frightful puns, and the smallest of the bunch, little bespectacled Dickie, all set upon the shrieking Jacky and pulled and tugged at her bikini and patted and brushed her body pretending, with enough shouting to encourage a football team, that she was still thickly sand-covered.

But this was hardly to the liking of the other girls, especially—it looked to the greedy censorious eyes watching from the pebbles—of the pert redhead (was her name Jo?) who had been noted as showing a particular interest in the handsome Mike.

And so—with a great deal of "Hey, leave the silly twit alone" and "What do you want to go and knock over the poor old man's sand castle for?"—they succeeded at last in diverting the boys' attention from little Jacky into a sprint across the sand ("First to touch the breakwater" and "Last there's a sissy") in which as usual the muscular, and proud of it, Bob was first home.

When they had all arrived at the breakwater and had begun a new outburst of shouting, arguing, and minor horseplay, the first heavy drops of rain began to fall from a suddenly clouded-over sky. The noisy group took no notice, except that the girl in the white swimsuit with the deep, deep tan complained in a loud voice that she would not be able "to get even five minutes of sunbathing." But the rest of the beach, of course, promptly retreated in face of this unpleasant manifestation of unfair Nature. Towels were hastily folded and draped over husbandly arms, sandwiches were stuffed, sand-speckled as they were, back into their plastic boxes, children were summoned; spades and pails were frantically

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gathered, and small procession after small procession made its way back to the cheerless prospect of boarding-house bedrooms.

When the invaders noticed this sensible mass retreat it seemed only to heighten their spirits and they set off on a monster leap-frog chase all the way across to the other side of the beach, still ignoring the progressively heavier raindrops. Then the boys began a game of stone throwing, aiming first at one object until it had been hit and then moving on to something else, a discarded beach shoe, a seaweed-draped spur of rock, a soggy ice-cream carton.

The girls made bets on their prowess.

"Hit it, hit it, Mike," screeched Jacky. "I'll give you such a kiss if you do."

"You'll keep your thieving little hands off him," Jo, the pert redhead, yelled almost as loudly.

"I'll bet Bob gets it, I bet he does," shouted Christine, who was blonde and wore her hair piled high on her head.

"Bob," the punster Herbert boomed out, "I bet a bob he can't."

"Darling Bob, hit it for God's sake, this rain's getting cold," the white-swimsuited well-tanned Liz begged, her voice not much less strident than the others'.

And at that moment the rain abruptly came down in sheets.

The group looked wildly round for shelter. And there not 50 yards away was the old Shell Museum.

The words were painted out on a long sun-bleached board running all the way across the front of the single-storied barnlike building just at the edge of the beach. A broad flight of sea-smoothed wooden steps led up to its veranda and the open d o u b l e - d o o r s beyond.

The group set off like a stampede of horses toward it, the girls screaming as the cold rain struck them, the boys shouting in sheer animal spirits.

And that was when they met old Mr. Peduncle.

He was sitting just inside the doors at a small oilcloth-covered table on which were scattered dozens of little shells, sitting where he had been all morning in his old brown-varnished wheelchair with the mottled brown leatherette seat and back. He was a big man, filling the chair like a great mound of wheat in his old shabby check suit, and he had a large head, deep pink in hue and mound-shaped, descending from a round skull covered with sparse white hairs to two big cheeks. He sat almost immobile, only his hands moving restlessly but with method among the shells on the table, sorting and shifting, and his eyes, bright and beady behind a tiny pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez in the middle of that big expression-

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less face, darting quickly here and there.

"'Hey," demanded Mike, the handsome one, as they all crowded up into the shelter of the veranda, "is this place open? Can we come in like?"

Mr. Peduncle looked up at the white-painted board beside the open doors, its black letters fretted by the sea winds.

"Admission three pence," he said in a voice that was quiet but plainly audible. "Children, one penny."

"That'll be a penny for this one then," said the boy with the glasses, Dickie, pushing Jacky sharply forward.

Mr. Peduncle took no notice. He slipped open the drawer in the table in front of him and brought out two rolls of cardboard tickets, one pink, one blue, a tall black leather-bound book and a small bottle of India ink with a steel-nibbed pen.

"There is also a two-and-sixpenny season ticket," he said. "Or life membership at three guineas."

He turned back the cover of the big black book. Its paper, once white, had faded to a uniform shade of buff but the ink of the entries on the first page stood out still bold and black. There were only seven names. The first of them had next to it the date: August 12, 1910.

Liz, the suntanned one in the white swimsuit, spoke sharply from outside on the veranda.

"For God's sake," she said, "pay him somebody, will you? I'm freezing."

But she was to wait before she got into the comparative warmth of the sea-battered building. Her remark produced, as all remarks made in that company tended to, a whole minor outbreak of noisy verbal warfare.

The redhead, Jo, was first in with a crack.

"Freezing?" she called out cheerfully. "Some people are never happy unless they're lying there baking in the sun."

"Yes," little Jacky came yelling in. "And with half a dozen boys dangling round too."

And then the blond muscular Bob came roaring to Liz's rescue.

"And who's never happy unless she's lying there doing something else? Eh, Jo girl, eh?"

"Nothing wrong with a bit of that," Jo shouted back, perfectly unabashed.

"All right, all right," Bob yelled. "I'm queuing up, old Jo."

"When you like, boy, when you like."

"Hey, Mike, you hear that?" little Dickie called out, though the handsome Mike, or anybody, would have had to be deaf not to have heard.

However, Mike took no notice of the crack, smiling noncommittally and busying himself with

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fishing in an inner pocket of his bathing trunks and producing a handful of half-crowns. He sprawled them thunderingly onto Mr. Peduncle's table displacing two or three of the neatly ranged little shells.

"Make it season tickets for one and all," he said. "You never know, this old place might come in useful."

Without a word Mr. Peduncle brought out from his drawer eight green cards and handed one to each of them as they stepped past his table and into the dark of the museum itself.

"I'll switch on the electric light for you," he said when they were all in. "If it's overcast outside it's difficult to see the specimens properly."

"There's nothing wrong with a bit of dark," said the blonde Christine, seizing the muscular Bob's arm with one hand and the handsome Mike's with the other.

But Mr. Peduncle was not to be put off. With surprising speed and dexterity he maneuvered his wheel chair round, shot down the alleyway between the two rows of glass-topped showcases that ran the length of the big room, and came to rest beside a small door marked "Private." There he reached up to a pair of switches and clicked one of them on.

It was not a particularly strong light that hung on a chain from one of the wooden beams across the ceiling but it did serve to show the accumulated specimens moderately well. There were hundreds of them. All the walls right up to the high windows were lined with them, hung in thin wire frames and each carefully labeled with its Latin name, its common name, and its place of origin. There were the pink and yellow and brown-spotted tapering cylinders of the volutes; the prickly murexes in an infinity of rock-colored shades; the mitres, fit headgear for miniature bishops, darkly red in the interior or vividly orange-splotched; the augers, wickedly pointed and delicately spotted, the many cones with their extraordinary variety of pattern; the wide-spreading scallops, the rapas, the chanks, and the turrids.

And in the two long rows of glass cases were the prize specimens, big and small—the Chambered Nautilus, the golden cowries, little Aristotle's Lanterns, a big startlingly pink Queen Conch, the Lace-edged Strombus, the Wrinkled Scorpion, the Striped Helmet with its alternate lines of white and golden-yellow, and the delicately cross-hatched Dunker's Triton.

Mr. Peduncle swished his old chair back to the table by the entrance from which he could look out over the rain-beaten beach and returned to his minute

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examination of the pile of shells he had been working on, apparently ignoring his visitors. The group wandered aimlessly round, with the solemn-faced Herbert the only one to pay much attention to the exhibits and then only to read out an occasional label with the object of perpetrating one of his terrible puns, a diversion which did little to raise the spirits of the others who seemed suddenly to have run out of steam.

But it was not long until the provocative redhead, Jo, always somewhat of a pioneer, hit on something a little more to the taste of her friends. She reached up and pretended to put her ear to a wide-mouthed conch hanging on the wall and then exclaimed in a loud voice, "What are the wild waves saying?"

She pretended to listen more intently.

"Oh," she shouted, "there's a little murmur in here says someone in this room's going to get married before they're much older."

She glanced significantly over at the handsome and moneyed Mike.

"Mind you," she bawled, "you never can tell with a boy."

Roars of laughter. And all the girls now must reach up and listen to shells of their own. Impudent Dickie joined them.

"Listen to this, listen to this," he shouted above the general hubbub. "I've news here from the wild waves that an engagement broken by mutual consent may be renewed before long."

Christine, the girl with the piled-up blonde hair, stepped backward from the shell she had her ear to.

"Cut it out, Dickie," she said, cold anger showing in her eyes and the taut line of her neck.

But Dickie was not one to learn.

"In spite of many and varied adventures," he intoned, "a certain person is confidently expected to return before long to her first and true love."

And now Mike intervened. He came rapidly up behind little Dickie and seized his arms in a swift lock.

"Whatever there was between Chris and me," he said, "is over and I'll thank you not to make any cracks."

He stood holding the helpless Dickie, and began slowly and painfully twisting Dickie's arms behind his back. There was a smile on his handsome mouth.

"Hey, let go," Dickie exclaimed, the pain putting an undertow of anxiety into his voice.

"When you've been taught your lesson," Mike replied.

Little Dickie gave a sudden sharp gasp.

"Let him go, you great big bully," young Jacky jumped in, loud as ever.

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"When I'm ready to," Mike replied.

Dickie let out a long whimper. The others stood round watching. It was an unpleasant moment. Then an unexpected voice broke in.

"Perhaps I can tell you something of the history of the museum?"

It was Mr. Peduncle, swiftly and silently beside them in his dark wheel chair.

"I've been here thirty years, you know," he said in those quiet but carrying tones of his. "I've not actually left the place in all that time. It wouldn't be possible. They'd have to bring along a crane for my chair."

Curly-haired, straight-nosed, cleft-chinned, Mike let little Dickie go. They stood looking at Mr. Peduncle, uneasily suspicious.

"Yes," he said, "I just have a red flag I can hoist as a signal if anything should happen to go wrong, but otherwise I'm quite on my own here. Yet, do you know, I'm perfectly content. I have my work, you see."

"Work?" said the pert Jo.

She glanced round at the yellowy varnished wooden walls with their rows and rows of shells, at the heavy old-fashioned display cases, at the table by the entrance doors with its scattering of black mussel shells and the little tiny white whorls of other British mollusks.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Peduncle, "this is my work. The study and comparison of shells. I pay the children on the beach a penny a bucket for them, and in summer it takes me all my time to go through what they bring in. And every now and again in a moment of discovery I hit on some difference in one particular shell that is significant, something that adds a drop to the ocean of knowledge. That makes it all worthwhile."

It was at this point that Jacky began to laugh. She put back her seventeen-year-old head and laughed and laughed.

"Shells," she gurgled out. "Spending a lifetime going over and over a lot of moldy old shells."

"You think it humorous," said the old man, unruffled. "Well, let me tell you that systematic study in any field of knowledge is always worthwhile. The making of observations, the carrying out of comparisons. They pay in the end. Sometimes in quite unexpected ways."

A ray of pale sunlight came suddenly in through the high windows above his head, effacing the pale glare of the light.

"Hey, the rain's stopped," shouted Bob, the muscle-boy.

He gave the pertly provocative Jo a friendly slap.

"Race you to the sea; Jo girl," he yelled.

And in less than ten seconds

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the whole group were out.

While the sun shone they continued to sport on the beach and the more timid holidaymakers, creeping out again with the better weather, once more were forced to give up most of the flat area of the sand to their activities. They ran races, jumping over any obstacle and careless of whom they bumped into. They played with the big rubber ball. They grabbed a child's plastic pail and started throwing water over each other, as well as over a good many onlookers.

Only the already deep-brown Liz dropped out after a while to take advantage of the shining sun and lie full length on the sand improving an unimprovable tan. For a little she succeeded in securing the muscular Bob as an attendant, but before long red-headed Jo, never content for anyone to be doing nothing if she could help it, came up and started whispering into Bob's ear and he leaped to his feet and began discussing some sort of handicap race from one s e a - w o r n breakwater all the way across to the other.

They ran it too. Bob gave Jo a short start and she won by a yard. And this, of course, in its turn started a series of other races between girls and boys, Jacky against Bob, squealing all over the beach when he outdistanced her, Jo with the same handicap against first Herbert, who dead-heated with her, and then Mike whom she failed to beat and ended up tussling with, to the great disgust of a group of old biddies up in deck-chair row.

And eventually even L i z, deprived of any sort of male attention, got to her feet and issued a challenge to Jo. She nearly beat her too, for all the sultry laziness of her appearance; but at the last moment up by the edge of the pebbles Liz's breath gave out and she collapsed moodily onto the scuffed sand.

And shortly after this, as suddenly as they had come, the whole group disappeared. They made for the promenade, still talking at the tops of their voices, laughing and shrieking. And then came the roar of the engine of young Mike's sports car and they were gone.

"Good riddance," came the mutters from the staid row of deck chairs also beginning to break up as the sun dipped toward the distant sea horizon.

But they came back again late in the evening. The noise of the car was heard coming to a squealing halt somewhere at the far end of the promenade, and some of them came down to the beach again in the soft light of the very last of the long day.

Old Mr. Peduncle was taking the air on his veranda. When Jo and Bob glanced back at the wooden structure of the Shell

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Museum, after they had climbed over the long weed-decked breakwater and dropped down into the darkness on the far side, a tiny glitter of light struck off from the little pair of pince-nez that Mr. Peduncle wore perched on his broad pink-colored nose. It sent a brief flash out into the oncoming night . . .

The group did not visit the museum at all the next day. Mr. Peduncle saw them, of course. Anyone keeping even half an eye on the beach could not have failed to see them. They made, if possible, even more of a nuisance of themselves than they had the day before. From morning till dusk it was nothing but shouting. "Hey, Mike." "Hey, Dickie." "Watch it, Herbert." "Go on, Jo."

Mr. Peduncle noted the facts, as he noted all the facts that came his way. He saw how friendly the redheaded Jo and the handsome, moneyed Mike seemed to be. He saw Dickie going to immense pains while the serious castle-building father was away at lunchtime to undermine the new and even more elaborate structure he had built that day, so that when the poor man came back ready to add a few last refinements, the whole thing collapsed as soon as he knelt in front of it.

He noted that the blonde Christine had succeeded in playing off Herbert against Dickie most of the morning to her visible satisfaction. He saw that in the afternoon Liz, who had actually managed to sun-bathe all morning and was doing the same thing again now, had persuaded both Herbert and Bob to sit beside her.

He saw all this and he sorted through some two hundred shells that the penny-a-bucket children had brought him.

And on the next day, when naturally enough it did rain, the group burst into the museum once more. None of them had kept the green season-ticket but Mr. Peduncle did not mind.

"I remember you," he said.

Again there was no one else in the big beam-crossed room, and again the group made a fair nuisance of themselves, here as elsewhere.

They had not been inside long and the rain was still beating down on the black-tarred roof in a steady thrumming when the redheaded Jo announced that she must have a drink.

"Bob," she proclaimed, "you're the fastest on your feet, sprint along to the stand and get us all something to drink. I'm parched."

"Yes, Joanna," Bob said, with unexpected acquiescence considering how hard the rain was coming down.

He squared his shoulders at the entrance doors and in a moment

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was off, pounding over the pebbles below at a tremendous rate.

He must have kept it up all the way to the ice-cream stand and all the way back with his big paws wrapped round eight cartons of orange drink. But when he handed them over—"Here you are, Joanna"—he got little thanks.

She took one long suck through her pair of plastic straws and jerked her head up in disgust.

"Nuts," she said. "It's not cold, it's hot. Who the hell wants a drink of tepid orange?"

She flung her carton down in a corner.

"Tepid, is it?" shouted Herbert, the punmaker. "When the chap at the stand poured it out he didn't look which *tep h'ed* used."

The others were prepared to accord him the customary noisy groan, but Jo thought differently.

"Did you think your drink was cold then?" she snapped at him.

He blinked. "Well," he said, "I did think it was coolish, as a matter of fact."

"Then you're as big a fool as you look."

And then little Dickie caught the rough edge of her tongue. The rain had slackened and he was the first to notice it.

"Hey, Jo," he called. "Sun's coming out. How about I race you to the sea? Same prize as Bob got the first day?"

Jo looked at him. "No, thank you," she said bluntly.

They left then, as noisily as they had come. And Mr. Peduncle took his chair across to his private quarters at the back, fetched a walking stick and used it upside down to jockey Jo's drink carton laboriously across the floor, out onto the veranda, and down onto the pebbles of the beach.

Then he went back to sorting shells . . .

The next day was brilliantly sunny, for once really hot. And Jo died.

They had been playing the burying-in-the-sand game. Each of them in turn had volunteered or been noisily cajoled into lying in the soft dry sand just beside one of the high breakwaters and been covered all over by the others, with eventually only two plastic straws from an orange-drink carton left to breathe through. A sort of competition had evolved out of the game: it was a matter of completing the burial and then leaving the victim deserted for as long as possible.

It had begun as a practical joke and developed into a cruel-edged test of endurance. The rules seemed to be that each one of the party went off in a different direction, and the one whose nerve broke first and who came back to release the victim from the heavy covering of sand was the next to be buried.

More or less everybody on the beach was aware of the rules.

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The loud shouts in which they had been arrived at insured this.

Jo, bright red hair encased in a bathing cap that matched the vivid green of her minimal bikini, was the last of them to submit to the burying process, and, so it appeared later, she had been covered up a little more deeply than any of the others so that it had really been impossible for her to have kicked her way to freedom.

However, she had her two straws to breathe through and they were well clear of the sand over her. So she had been in no real danger. Until somehow a pail of sand had been tipped over the place where the straws pointed up to the serenely blue sky. The police surgeon gave it as his opinion that death would have come very quickly.

Of course when the tragedy was discovered—little Dickie had been the one whose nerve had broken this time and who had come back to find the brazenly noisy Jo no longer alive—there was a tremendous fuss. The local constable had been summoned by Bob, who had run in his bathing trunks all the way through the little town looking for him, and in his turn the constable had sent for his superior officers from farther along the coast. Then the various auxiliaries had been brought in—the police surgeon, the ambulance men, the shirt-sleeved detectives with measuring tapes and elaborately operated cameras.

And the local C.I.D. Chief, glaringly incongruous on the beach in his heavy dark-brown suit, frequently removing his battered soft hat to wipe a sweaty forehead, had questioned at length each of the individuals of the group. And, for all that the town constable prowled stolidly in a sort of invisible circle round the spot where the interrogations took place, the main outlines of the matter percolated quickly enough to the remaining holidaymakers on the beach, all studiously pretending not to notice the activity going on near the breakwater.

It seemed that each member of the group had wandered far from the place they had buried Jo in an attempt to hold out longest from rescuing her, and that none of them had seen any of the others after a couple of minutes from their simultaneous departure. Nor had any of them kept much of an eye on the time. They were all totally vague about everything. None seemed to have been back before any of the others, though they were all converging on the spot again when little Dickie had made his discovery. None certainly had been near enough, so they said, to have seen whether anybody else had chanced to go near Jo's recumbent body.

Much the same result came out

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of the slow inquiries which half a dozen detectives, sand trickling into their solid shoes, made among the other holidaymakers. Nobody had taken much notice when the noisy little group had moved away. They had got on thankfully with their own affairs, reading the newspapers, knitting, cricket playing, sand-castle building.

So at the end of an investigation that had taken almost the rest of the day, the C.I.D. Chief's final word to the remaining seven had been taken everywhere as the official verdict. "Of course," he had said, "there'll have to be an inquest, though I don't see that it'll really get us much forrader." And he had added a request that the group not leave the district until after the inquest had been held.

The next day, which was also brilliantly sunny, the reduced group made a much muted appearance, contenting themselves with sitting along the top of the wall overlooking the beach, and wearing reasonable clothes in spite of the heat.

But the day after, when massively building-up clouds threatened thunder and it seemed hotter than ever, their attitude was not so decorous. They continued to sit on the sea wall just above the black-tarred roof of the Shell Museum, but they were by no means as quiet as they had been the day before. They were, in fact, decidedly quarrelsome, and not at all careful to keep their voices down.

Little waves of shock ran all the way along the row of deck chairs at the foot of the wall, back and forth with each new outbreak from above.

Then the storm came. There was one eerie flash of purplish lightning which seemed to illuminate and transform the whole beach, and almost simultaneously a single peal of thunder cracked out from directly overhead. And then the rain began, pelting down with tropical violence.

The group got inside the museum in seconds.

Mr. Peduncle was seated as always in his battered old wheel chair at the table by the entrance doors, his huge body still and mound-shaped, his hands moving over the shells spread out in front of him, his little bright-blue eyes sharp behind the tiny gold-rimmed pince-nez that seemed almost lost on his large face. He watched the seven of them push their way past into the dim interior of the shell-surrounded room and offered no comment.

The talk now was all of "getting out of this bloody place" and "to hell with telling that idiot Inspector." They spoke to each other in sharp biting phrases, which echoed and clashed noisily in shadowy confines of the museum.

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Bob, with his body almost bursting the blue T-shirt and white cotton trousers he wore, came and stood for a moment at the open doors, looking impatiently at the thundering rain. He seemed half determined to repeat his dash through the downpour of three days earlier.

"Damn it," he said to no one in particular, "Jo was a nice kid but she's dead and there's nothing we can do for her."

The declaration appeared to strike Mr. Peduncle with particular force. His fingers abruptly stopped moving over the shells on his table as Bob pronounced the dead girl's name. He looked up at Bob intently.

"You will tell me it's not my business," the old shell collector said, "but you ought to wait a little longer."

Christine, the blonde with the high-piled hair, swung round.

"No," she said loudly, "it isn't any of your business. And when we're ready to go we'll go."

Mike glared out at the rain.

"Just as soon as this stops," he promised, "I'm off. The car's just at the end of the prom, and you won't see me for dust."

Curiously, Mr. Peduncle did not at that moment repeat his advice. Instead he opened the drawer at his table and felt about inside it. Apparently he could not find what he wanted, because after half a minute he brought out the tall black book, opened it with a little sigh which might have been audible to some of them had they not gone back to their noisy bickering, and tore out a sheet from the back. He then uncapped his bottle of India ink and with the steel-nibbed pen wrote a few words on the torn-out page, folded it over, wrote again, and finally tucked the whole into a pocket of his old check suit.

Little Dickie was now looking out at the rain.

"I think it's not so bad now," he announced. "Let's go."

The statuesque Liz glanced through the open doors.

"Go out in this?" she said. "You have to be crazy."

And certainly the rain was still beating down with considerable force.

"Well, I'm not staying cooped up here more than another few minutes," Dickie, once so cheerful, announced with distinct viciousness.

Mr. Peduncle abruptly swung his chair along the sand-scattered floor of the museum and stopped it by the door at the back marked "Private." Here there was a lanyard running up through a little hole in the roof. Mr. Peduncle untwisted the thin rope and pulled it energetically.

Herbert, the serious, saw him.

"What the hell are you doing?" he demanded.

Mr. Peduncle looked at him

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through his tiny glasses.

"I was pulling up my red signal flag," he replied tranquilly. "There's something I want."

He wheeled his chair back to the entrance doors but stopped now in front of his table instead of behind it so that he almost completely blocked the exit.

"There is something I ought to tell you," he announced. "I know which one of you killed Jo."

They all turned to face him. He sat there in the doorway, the hands which had moved rapidly over the shells on the table, sorting and sifting, lying quite still now on the arms of the chair. For a long moment they looked steadily at him, and then as though on a given signal their glances flickered from one to the other, as if a wordless conspiracy was beginning to form.

"I mentioned the other day," Mr. Peduncle remarked steadily, "that I have a mind accustomed by long training to observe first and then to classify. You were disparaging about that process. Yet observation and comparison have led me to my answer."

The self-assured Mike gave a little twist of a smile.

"The armchair detective, eh?" he said. "Well, name your name."

"Certainly," said Mr. Peduncle.

At the placid conviction in his voice the unity of the group inside the dim museum visibly shivered. The glances that were exchanged now were no longer conspiratorial but probing.

"I have had a good deal of opportunity of observing you all since you came to the beach," Mr. Peduncle said. "Both here in the museum and outside as you played at your various games. So when I learned how Jo died, I asked myself if one of you might be responsible. Certainly no one else was going to murder her. It is hardly likely that the gentleman whose sand castle you destroyed would go to such lengths for revenge. No, I had only to look among the seven of you."

Again a flicker of uneasiness passed round the group. Only Mike resisted it.

"You said you could name a name," he challenged.

"So I can," replied Mr. Peduncle. "You see, when I asked myself who among you had reason to hate that girl enough to kill her but was concealing that hatred—and one of you was—the answer came to me soon enough. As I sifted over the facts about you I hit on one quite evident thing standing out as decidedly out of the ordinary."

"Here, let's just go," Herbert broke in, looking not quite as sedately serious as usual.

"No," said Mike, "I want to hear the man."

"No, don't go," Mr. Peduncle said firmly. "Not until I've told

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you about the races you ran. And the one that had an unexpected winner."

His big head moved suddenly and the twinkling little eyeglasses were focused sharply on the muscle-boy Bob.

"Yes," said Mr. Peduncle, "you, Bob, are the fastest runner of the lot—even the girl Jo said so. Yet when you ran against her she won."

It was little Dickie who broke in here, staring insolently down at Mr. Peduncle.

"You big goop," he said. "That was a handicap race."

"Oh, yes, I know Jo had a head start," Mr. Peduncle replied unperturbed. "But she had exactly the same start over Mike a few minutes later, and Mike beat her easily."

He let a silence fall over them. His eyes were fixed on Bob.

Bob took a step forward.

And at that moment there came the sound of rapidly running feet mounting the steps outside. Everybody wheeled.

A curious headless figure in bright red mackintosh shot up onto the veranda. Once under the shelter it flipped back the plastic raincoat it had been wearing over its head to reveal itself as a boy of about ten.

"Hello, Mr. Peduncle," he said. "I saw your flag up, and Mum said I'd better run over and see if you were in trouble."

"Oh, no," Mr. Peduncle answered. "No trouble. Just a note I wanted delivered."

And he pulled the little folded slip of paper out of his pocket, leaned forward, and thrust it into the boy's hand. The boy took a look at what had been written on the outside. His eyes widened.

"Right ho," he said, and instantly vanished from the veranda.

Mr. Peduncle turned back to Bob.

"I think," he said, "you were just going to tell me that you lost that race on purpose. It was a bet between you and Jo, wasn't it? Rather a secret kind of bet, of course. But one which brought you your reward later that night. Isn't that so?"

Bob tilted up his smooth face. "Yes, it did, if you want to know," he said.

"Yes," said Mr. Peduncle. "I simply used that instance as an illustration of the sort of unusual thing I was looking for, and of the danger of not taking all the associated facts into consideration. I might just as well have chosen to consider the race that Liz ran."

He gave a flick to the wheel at his side and the old brown chair swung round so that he was directly facing the dark-tanned sun-worshipping Liz.

"If the evident thing about Bob was that he could run faster than

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any of you," he said, "the evident thing about Liz is that she does not like running at all, and whenever the sun shines she simply lies there enjoying it. But then on one occasion she challenged Jo to a race."

They were all looking at Liz now, even Mike, and with a degree of accusation in all their looks. Here was one of them who had been a bit of an "odd girl out."

"Yes," Mr. Peduncle went on, "and one could easily imagine a motive for Liz. Jo had taken the boys away from her. I mean simply that she had just taken Bob, who was sitting by her, off to play beach games. But I am sure Jo could have taken boys away in the long term too."

Mr. Peduncle's gaze moved quietly over the shells in their wire holders on the wall all round.

"You see," he went on, "there was another example of the small variation that seems to mean a great deal. But, of course, you have to look at all the facts. Some variations are significant, others are just accidental. And plainly this instance of Liz getting to her feet and running a race was just accidental. She had been deprived of her temporary escort, she hoped she could gain a victory over Jo, she failed. Not exactly a reason for murder."

"Hey," said little Dickie to the rest of them, "you know what the old fool's going to do? He's going to cook up some sort of story about each one of us, and none of them's going to mean any more than any of the others. Look, the rain's definitely got less now. Let's get out of here."

There was a chorus of agreement. The group began coming toward Mr. Peduncle.

He made no attempt to move.

"I see," he said, "that I must admit I have been keeping you under false pretenses."

"Then you don't know who it was," Christine said sharply.

"Oh, yes, I know. But I was, I confess, a trifle unsure how the rest of you would take what I had to tell you. Suppose, I said to myself, they feel their loyalty to their dead companion is greater than any loyalty to society. They might combine to attack me and help the guilty one escape."

It was Mike who laughed. "You know, we might," he said.

"That is why I tried to detain you with suppositions," Mr. Peduncle explained gravely.

"So we'll be off then," Herbert said, recovering his assurance.

"You'll go and six of you will never know who killed her?" Mr. Peduncle asked with a flash of his beady blue eyes behind the gold-rimmed pince-nez.

Their steps slowed. They came to a halt.

"Oh, all right, tell us," Mike said.

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Mr. Peduncle looked out of the open doors of the museum. It was still raining, though not as torrentially as before. And the wet and dreary beach appeared totally deserted.

"Well," he said, "I told you that I was on the lookout for slight but significant variations in behavior. And something that was said shortly after you came in here just now gave it to me. 'Jo was a nice kid but she's dead.' Those were the words. And at once they put me in mind of something. Something curious."

They were paying him an almost awed attention now.

"You all," he continued, "used to call her Jo. All except one of you. And he only started to call her Joanna after the first evening you were here."

The gaze behind the tiny pince-nez traveled slowly round.

"Didn't you, Bob?" said Mr. Peduncle. "And didn't you switch back to calling her Jo after she was dead?"

Bob did not reply.

"Now why does a young man suddenly take to calling a girl by her formal name?" Mr. Peduncle resumed. "Is this a significant variation? Well, coupled with the bet that Bob won, the bet that entitled him to that evening walk to a secluded spot behind the breakwater, undoubtedly it was significant. What was the somewhat coarse expression that Jo herself used? Yes: you never can tell with a boy. No, Bob, you didn't come up to expectations, did you? And Jo, when she was disappointed in her little treats, whether it was a boy or a carton of orangeade, could be unpleasantly spiteful, bitterly wounding, couldn't she?"

Suddenly Bob moved. He took one long bound across the width of the room and from the shell-covered wall he snatched one particular shell. Mr. Peduncle knew what it was at once. It was his prize specimen of Terebra Maculata, commonly known as the Marlin Spike, a sharp-pointed auger almost nine inches long, tough as steel, and no mean weapon.

"All right," Bob shouted. "You know a hell of a lot, don't you? Well, if you're silenced I'll take a risk with my friends."

And he launched himself with bunched athlete's muscles at the chair-bound Mr. Peduncle.

Chair-bound, but wheel-chaired. Mr. Peduncle's big hands flicked hard at the wheels beside him. His chair shot forward at a sharp angle. Bob tried to turn to catch him, skidded on the sand-dusted floor, and crashed heavily to his side.

Before he even had time to get up, the local constable was thumping up the stairs of the veranda, in answer to Mr. Peduncle's summons.

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It was a curious caper: good-looking girl checking into a motel under a false name, giving a false make and license number for her car—and no motel monkey business. But, as Danny King said, he had a new idea running around in his head and he wanted to try a test run . . .

TEST RUN

by JAMES HOLDING

"LOOK, GERT," DANNY KING said to her, "there's not a bit of harm in it."

"Maybe not," Gert said, brushing back a wing of her shiny hair with one hand, "but I'm not crazy about the idea, all the same."

"Why not?"

"Well, a motel, after all. If anybody recognized me going into that Camelot Inn they might get the wrong idea."

Danny laughed. "Come on, Gert, everybody knows you're not the motel type. And besides, the Camelot Inn is twenty miles away—clear across the city to the turnpike entrance. Who's going to recognize you way out there?"

"But I don't understand why you want me to do it," Gert persisted. She looked at Danny out of her startlingly blue eyes. "It sounds mighty funny to me, if you want the truth."

Danny's round red face took on a pained expression. "You don't trust me, do you, Gert? After all this time you still don't trust me. Isn't that it?"

Gert shrugged beautiful shoulders.

"Have I ever made any passes at you since you asked me not to?" Danny said.

"No-o-o. I'll give you that. Not since that first week."

"Okay. So this isn't a pass, either. You can stop worrying."

"If it isn't a pass, what is it?"

"An experiment," Danny explained. "A new idea I've got running around in my head that I want to try out, that's all. So why can't you help me a little?" His voice was cajoling.

Gert wavered. She still thought Danny was trying a fancy scheme to get her into a motel room with him. Yet she was more than half in love with him and wouldn't

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really have minded, except for the sharp memory of her mother's endless refrain during her teens: "Don't give *any* man *any*thing, Gert, until he marries you. You can't trust a single one of them."

She looked at Danny King's crewcut head, his candid brown eyes, his squat powerful body. She listened for the faint false note she had learned to detect in his voice when he wasn't leveling with her. And she thought to herself once again that her mother had undoubtedly been right. You couldn't trust any of them. Not even Danny.

"She said, "I could get into trouble using a false name couldn't I?"

"At a motel?" Danny chuckled. "Half the couples don't register under their own names. You know that."

Gert did know it. She made one more token objection. "Couldn't *you* get into trouble, though, Danny? Trading places with me?"

Danny sensed that she had just about decided to cooperate. "I'll be absolutely okay, Gert," he assured her. "I just want to check out a room at the motel without anybody knowing it's me, don't you see? This is what they call objective research, baby."

Gert said, "All right, then, Danny, I'll do it. But you better believe that if it isn't exactly the way you told me, I'll never speak to you again." She smiled to take some of the sting out of her words. But she wasn't entirely kidding, either. She said, "The reservation is for tonight?"

Danny nodded. "Arrival before six. And ask for one of the rooms with color TV."

"What name did you say I should use?"

"I made the reservation in the name of Susan Jones."

"They'll know that isn't my name."

"How? There are hundreds of Susan Joneses."

"I just don't look like a Susan," she said. "Do I?"

"Sure. I thought you were worried about the Jones."

"Oh, no. I think that's all right. After all, my real name is Gert Smith."

And there's a piece of cockeyed feminine logic for you, Danny reflected. But he didn't say anything to Gert except, "You'd better get started, then. See you about ten o'clock."

She glanced at her watch. It was 5:05. "Okay," she said. "And you'd better show up!"

"I'll be there, baby. Here." He handed her a ten-dollar bill. "Buy yourself a drink and the best dinner in the joint."

She took the money and stuffed it into her purse. "I hope you know what you're doing, Danny. Because I don't."

She went out and several

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minutes later he heard the starter of her car grind briefly behind the building. He stood up and stretched, nodding to himself in satisfaction. He had told Gert the truth. It *was* an experiment. A pilot operation, a test run—to see if the possibilities were as big as he figured they were. He wouldn't use Gert again, though. If things worked out, he'd build up a staff to do all the groundwork . . .

Gert drove the twenty miles to the Camelot Inn in forty minutes. Under the impression that she could think more clearly at thirty miles an hour than at fifty, she held her speed down deliberately. For she felt a pressing—indeed, an urgent—need to think clearly about this strange project that Danny King had persuaded her to undertake for him.

Why did he want to spend a night in a motel not ten miles from his own home if not for the obvious reason she had accused him of? Why have her register, instead of doing it himself? Why have her use a false name? Why make an advance reservation, for that matter, when he knew perfectly well that a big place like the Camelot Inn wouldn't be even half filled at this time of year? And what did he mean by "objective research"?

To none of these questions could she find a satisfying answer, despite her slow driving pace. She sighed and shook her head, impatient with such inconclusive thinking. She tried to dispel her uneasiness by reflecting that since her mind was basically straightforward and uncomplicated (which it was) she was simply too naive to fathom the shadowy motives behind a scheme as devious as Danny's seemed to be. And she stopped thinking about it as the Camelot Inn loomed a few hundred yards ahead, consoling herself that she wouldn't be caught dead doing this sneaky thing that Danny wanted her to do if she didn't like the man so much and harbor at least a faint hope that some day he would propose marriage to her.

Oh, well. She drove her two-year-old Plymouth into the driveway of the Camelot Inn and pulled up under the projecting roof in front of the motel office. Briskly she climbed out from under the wheel, entered the lobby, and stepped up to the registration desk.

"I'm Susan Jones," she told the clerk. "I made a reservation for tonight."

The clerk took a thin stack of forms from a pigeonhole behind the desk and leafed through them. "Ah, yes, Miss Jones," he said, "here we are. For tonight only." He separated one form from the rest. "You wanted one of our large rooms."

"Yes," said Gert, "I like plenty

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of space. Is there a TV?"

"Of course. Every room in every Camelot Inn in America has a TV set in it," he said proudly. "And in our case, it's color TV."

"Good," said Gert. She busied herself filling out the registration form. Susan Jones, she wrote, 222 Treasure Road, Tampa, Florida, printing the fictitious name and address in uncertain block letters before adding Susan Jones's signature in a backhand script as different from her own as she could manage. Where the registration blank asked for the make of her car, she scribbled "Oldsmobile," and for its license number, the first six digits that came to her mind.

When she passed the registration form back to the clerk, a printed notice beside the cash register caught her eye. "Advance Payment Requested, Please."

"Oh," she said, fumbling with her purse, "how much will the room be? I didn't realize you wanted payment in advance."

The clerk grinned at her. "Sixteen dollars. But that sign merely permits us to be more selective," he said. "Guests who make reservations are not required to pay in advance. You can pay on departure." He handed her a key. "You'll have number 327. It's one of our best rooms—on the first floor, around to the rear away from the highway." He showed her on a plan of the motel grounds how to reach Room 327. "I hope you'll have a pleasant stay, Miss Jones." His eyes followed her slender figure with approval as she left.

"There!" she thought with relief, steering her car toward the rear of the great hollow square that was the Camelot Inn. "That's done, and it wasn't anything, really. Danny was right. Nobody even bothered to look at my car or my license number." She wondered if the Advance Payment sign had answered her question about Danny's reason for making a telephoned reservation. "That tightwad!" she said to herself with a tender smile, "I'll bet he's going to jump the room rent!"

She parked her car directly in front of Room 327, as Danny had instructed her to do if the space was available.

The room was all the clerk had claimed for it. Large, air-conditioned, tastefully decorated, it offered the weary traveler two double beds, two armchairs, a bath with shower and tub, and an impressive console color-TV set mounted on a massive swivel base.

By the time Gert had washed up it was a little past six o'clock. She walked through the open central court of the motel, past the empty swimming pool in its center, to the motel's King Arthur dining room, and had a leisurely

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old-fashioned and a sirloin steak at a table for two; then wandered back to Room 327 just as darkness was falling. Only half the parking spaces in front of the rooms in her row were occupied.

She still had a couple of hours to kill. So she locked the door of her room on the inside, turned on the television set, and settled herself against the headboard of one of the beds to wait for Danny King.

She was dozing with her head bent forward at an uncomfortable angle when two rapid taps followed by three widely spaced ones sounded on her door. She roused herself, got off the bed, and went to the door. "Who is it?" she said in a low voice.

"Me." Danny's voice sent a wave of relief through her. She took down the chain and opened the door wide enough for Danny to slip in. He was dressed, she saw, in navy slacks, a dark gray sweater, and old sneakers. He quickly closed the door.

"Good work, Gert," he complimented her in a whisper. "It was a breeze, wasn't it? Just like I said?"

"I didn't have any trouble, if that's what you mean," Gert whispered back.

"Me, neither," said Danny. "All I had to do was find your car and I knew which room you were in."

Gert nodded and eyed Danny narrowly. He wasn't even looking at her; he was inspecting the TV set and whistling softly between his teeth. She had to admit that he certainly didn't seem intent on making any passes at her. Just the opposite, in fact. He was transparently anxious to get rid of her, now that they were alone in a motel room. He turned up the sound a little on the TV set to cover his voice and said, "You can go home now, Gert. I'll take over."

"Not before you tell me what this is all about," Gert said.

"After we're married," said Danny, "I'll tell you. For now, on your way."

Gert's breath caught in her throat. "Danny!" she said, her eyes widening to their starriest. "Oh, Danny!" It wasn't exactly how she had pictured his proposal, but, she told herself happily, it would have to do.

Danny opened the room door quietly, peered out, then pushed Gert through the door with an amiable pat on her derrière. "Get lost now" he whispered. "See you tomorrow."

He closed the door. Gert climbed into her car and started it, looking for Danny's Chrysler which ought to be parked nearby. She didn't see it. A battered pickup truck was parked in the slot next to hers.

She backed out and left the

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motel through the gasoline station which shared the same property. Nobody saw her go.

It wasn't until two days later that Danny got the call from Swanson's TV Sales and Service. His secretary switched the call to his phone, and Danny answered in his usual ebullient manner. "King's Distributing Company," he said into the phone. "Danny King speaking. Who's this?"

"Howard Swanson, Danny. Remember me?"

"I should, after supplying you with those special sets you sold to some motel some place."

"Camelot Inn," Swanson said.

"Yeah, I remember now. What can I do for you, Howard? I hope the sets are performing all right?"

"They're performing fine," Swanson said. "Except one of them was stolen the other night in spite of your fancy burglarproof swivel mounting. The thief took the set and the swivel and all, according to the manager."

"Wow!" said Danny in amazement. "That swivel base weighs almost two hundred pounds! What did the manager do, rent the room to a troup of circus strongmen?"

"He rented the room, he says, to an innocent-eyed blonde girl named Susan Jones who couldn't have lifted the TV set an inch off the floor."

Danny said, "She must have been working with a gang. But as long as the Inn has her registration card—"

Swanson said, "The manager reported it to the police yesterday, and they've already checked out the girl. No girl named Susan Jones, no address like the one she gave, no car with the license number she gave."

"For Pete's sake!" Danny said. "Doesn't anybody check the guests' cars when they register at the Inn?"

"That's what I asked the manager. And he says who has time to run out in the driveway and check every car and license number when the desk is busy? Anyway, Danny, the TV set's gone, and Camelot Inn wants a replacement pronto. I told them I don't have any more of those special jobs in stock but I'd check my distributor and see if you have one. Do you?" Swanson's voice was anxious.

Danny waved a hand. "Sure," he said, "I've got a few more in the warehouse, Howard."

"Deliver me one early this afternoon, will you? So I can get it to Camelot Inn today? They've already filed their insurance claim."

"Okay," said Danny briskly. "That's model 378A with the special 017 weighted swivel base, right? Wholesales at $402.80." Danny laughed. "I ought to quote you retail list since you're only ordering one."

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"Sue me," Swanson said. "My heart bleeds for you, Danny. And so do the hearts of your other dealers who are retailing their way into the poorhouse while you wholesale yourself into a fortune!"

"Don't be like that, Howard. You ought to feel grateful to the guy who lifted that set from the Camelot Inn. He threw an extra sale right into your lap."

"Into yours, too," Swanson said. "Don't forget that."

"I won't," said Danny. "I won't."

He hung up gently. He was smiling. Ask anybody and they'd tell you that Danny King was one of the biggest TV wholesalers in the tri-state area. And now he was going to be even bigger. Because he'd found a way to sell the same TV set twice to the same customer. And thinking of the thousands of TV sets his customers had sold or leased to the hundreds of motels in the state, he couldn't help feeling cheerful.

Hundreds of pounds, though, was too much for one man to lift into a truck at four o'clock in the morning. He'd assign two men to each truck. And he'd start recruiting them right away. Also a staff of innocent-looking girls. One thing was sure: the margin he'd be working on was big enough to let him hire good help.

Danny rubbed his muscular hands together with satisfaction. The experiment had definitely been successful. The pilot run had worked out fine.

Now all he had to do was organize for mass production. And think up something to tell his secretary, Gert Smith.

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a *NERO WOLFE* detective *SHORT NOVEL* by

REX STOUT

complete in this issue

Here's the way it started: Archie Goodwin had just quit his job—yes, left the employ of Nero Wolfe for the thirtieth time, or maybe it was the fortieth. And while Archie was departing from Wolfe's premises, at 918 West 35th Street, New York City, even before Archie had reached the sidewalk in front of Nero's house, a pretty girl handed Archie a case on a silver-plated platter (fee: $50). But then the case turned into one of murder and Nero showed his true colors: Archie and his client were in a pickle; Nero had never tried to do a job without Archie's help; so why should Archie try to do one (the first on his own) without Nero's help? And then, of course, the client ("somewhat level-headed") had chosen Method Three— always a perilous procedure . . .

An engrossing short novel complete in this issue . . .

METHOD THREE FOR MURDER

by REX STOUT

WHEN I FIRST SET EYES ON Mira Holt, as I opened the front door and she was coming up the seven steps to the stoop, she was a problem, though only a minor one compared to what followed.

At the moment I was unemployed. During the years I have worked for Nero Wolfe and lived under his roof, I have quit and been fired about the same number of times—say, thirty or forty. Mostly we have been merely letting off steam, but sometimes we have meant it, more or less, and that Monday evening in September I was really fed up. The main dish at dinner had been pork stewed in beer, which both Wolfe and Fritz know I can get along without, and we had left the

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dining room and crossed the hall to the office, and Fritz had brought coffee and Wolfe had poured it, and I had said, "By the way, I told Anderson I'd phone and confirm his appointment for tomorrow morning."

And Wolfe had said, "No. Cancel it." He picked up the book he was on, John Gunther's *Inside Russia Today*.

I sat in my working chair and looked across his desk at him. Since he weighs a seventh of a ton he always looks big, but when he's being obnoxious he looks even bigger. "Do you suppose it's possible," I asked, "that that pork has a bloating effect?"

"No, indeed," he said, and opened the book.

If I had been a camel and the book had been a straw you could have heard my spine crack. He knew darned well he shouldn't have opened it until we had finished with coffee. I put my cup down. "I am aware," I said, "that you are sitting pretty. The bank balance is fat enough for months of paying Fritz and Theodore and me, and buying pork and beer in car lots, and adding more orchids to the ten thousand you've already got. I'll even grant that a private detective has a right to refuse to take a case with or without a reason. But as I told you before dinner, this Anderson is known to me, and he asked me as a personal favor to get him fifteen minutes with you, and I told him to come at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. If you're determined not to work because your tax bracket is already too high, okay, all you have to do is tell him no. He'll be here at eleven."

He was holding the book open and his eyes were on it, but he spoke. "You know quite well, Archie, that I must be consulted on appointments. Did you owe this man a favor?"

"I do now that he asked me for one and I said yes."

"Did you owe him one before?"

"No."

"Then you are committed but I am not. Since I wouldn't take the job it would waste his time and mine. Phone him not to come. Tell him I have other engagements."

So I quit. I admit that on some other occasions my quitting had been merely a threat, to jolt him into seeing reason, but not that time. When a mule plants its feet a certain way there's no use trying to budge it. I swiveled, got my memo pad, wrote on it, yanked the sheet off, got up and crossed to his desk, and handed him the sheet.

"That's Anderson's number," I told him. "If you're too busy to phone him not to come, Fritz can. I'm through. I'll stay with friends tonight and come tomorrow for my stuff."

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His eyes had left the book to glare at me. "Pfui," he said.

"I agree," I said. "Absolutely." I turned and marched out. I do not say that as I got my hat from the rack in the hall my course was clearly mapped for the next twenty years, or even twenty hours. Wolfe owned the house but not everything in it, for the furniture in my room on the third floor had been bought and paid for by me. That would have to wait until I found a place to move it to, but I would get my clothes and other items tomorrow, and would I come for them before eleven o'clock and learn from Fritz whether a visitor named Anderson was expected, or would it be better strategy to come in the afternoon and learn if Anderson had been admitted and given his fifteen minutes?

Facing that problem as I pulled the door open, I was immediately confronted by another one. A female was coming up the seven steps to the stoop.

I couldn't greet her and ask her business, since it was a cinch she would say she wanted to see Nero Wolfe and I couldn't carry on with a job I no longer held by returning to the office to ask Wolfe if he would receive a caller. Anyway I wouldn't. I couldn't step aside and let her enter by the door I had opened with no questions asked, since there was a possibility that she was one of the various people who had it in for Wolfe, and while I might have considered shooting him myself I didn't want to get him plugged by a total stranger. So I crossed the sill, pulled the door shut, sidestepped to pass her, and was starting down the steps when my sleeve was caught and jerked.

"Hey," she said, "aren't you Archie Goodwin?"

My eyes slanted down to hers. "You're guessing," I said.

"I am not. I've seen you at the Flamingo. You're not very polite, shutting the door in my face." She spoke in jerks, as if she wasn't sure she had enough breath. "I want to see Nero Wolfe."

"This is his house. Ring the bell."

"But I want to see you too. Let me in. Take me in."

My eyes had adjusted enough to the poor light to see that she was young, attractive, and hyped. She had on a cap with a beak. In normal circumstances it would have been a pleasure to escort her into the front room and go and badger Wolfe into seeing her, but as things stood I didn't even consider it.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I don't work here any more. I just quit. I am now on my way to bum a bed for the night. You'll have to ring the bell, but I should warn you that in Mr. Wolfe's present mood there's not a chance. You

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might as well skip it. If your trouble is urgent you ought to—"

"I'm not in trouble."

"Good. You're lucky."

She touched my sleeve. "I don't believe it. That you've quit."

"I do. Would I say so if I hadn't? Running the risk that you're a journalist and tomorrow there will be a front-page spread, 'Archie Goodwin, the famous private detective, has severed his connection with Nero Wolfe, also a detective, and it is thought—' "

"Shut up!" She was close to me, gripping my arm. She let loose and backed up a step. "I beg your pardon. I seem to be . . . you think Nero Wolfe wouldn't see me?"

"I don't think. I know."

"Anyway I want to see you too. For what I want I guess you would be better than him. I want some advice—no, not advice exactly, I want to consult you. I'll pay cash, fifty dollars. Can't we go inside?"

Naturally I was uplifted. Since I had left Wolfe, and since there was no other outfit in New York I would work for, my only possible program was to set up for myself, and before I even got down to the sidewalk here was a pretty girl offering me fifty bucks just for consultation.

"I'm afraid not," I told her, "since I no longer belong here. If that's your taxi waiting that will do fine, especially with the driver gone." A glance had shown me that there was no one behind the wheel of the cab at the curb. Probably, having been told to wait for her, he had beat it to Al's diner at the corner of Tenth Avenue, which was popular with hackies.

She shook her head. "I don't—" she began, and let it hang. She glanced around. "Why not here? It shouldn't take very long—I just want you to help me win a bet." She moved, descended two steps, and sat on the landing, swaying a little as she bent. "Have a seat."

We were still on Wolfe's premises, but he rarely used the outdoors part and after she paid me I could slip a buck under the door for rent. I sat down beside her, not crowding. I had often sat there watching the neighborhood kids play stoop ball.

"Do I pay in advance?" she asked.

"No, thanks, I'll trust you. What's the bet about?"

"Well . . ." She was squinting at me in the dim light. "I had an argument with a friend of mine. She said there were ninety-three women cab drivers in New York, and she thought it was dangerous because sometimes things happen in cabs that it takes a man to handle, and I said things like that can happen anywhere just as well as in cabs, and we had an argument, and she bet me fifty

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dollars she could prove something dangerous could happen in a cab that couldn't happen anywhere else. She thought up some things, but I made her admit they could happen other places too, and then she said what if a woman cab driver left her empty cab to go into a building for something, and when she came back there was a dead woman in the cab? She claimed that won the bet, and the trouble was I didn't know enough about what you're supposed to do when you find a dead body. That's what I want you to tell me. I'm sure she's wrong. And I'll pay you fifty dollars."

I was squinting back at her. "You don't look it," I stated.

"I don't look what?"

"Loony. Two things. First, the same thing could happen if she were driving a private car instead of a cab, and why didn't you tell her that? Second, where's the danger? She merely finds a phone and notifies the police. It would be a nuisance, but you said dangerous."

"Oh. Of course." She bit her lip. "I left something out. It's not her cab. She has a friend who is a cab driver, and she wanted to see what driving a cab was like, and her friend let her take it. So she can't notify the police because her friend broke some law when she let her take the cab, and she broke one too, driving a cab without a license, so it wouldn't have been the same if she had been driving a private car. And the only way I can win the bet is to prove that it wouldn't be dangerous.

"She doesn't know how the dead woman got in the cab or anything about it. All she has to do is get the body out of the cab, but that might be dangerous unless she did it just right, and that's what I want you to tell me so I won't make some awful mistake—I mean when I tell my friend why it wouldn't be dangerous. Things like where would she go to—to take it out of the cab, and would she have to wait until late at night, and how would she make sure there were no traces left in the cab." She bit her lip again, and her fingers were curled to make fists. "Things like that."

"I see." I had stopped squinting. "What's your name?"

She shook her head. "You don't have to know. I'm just consulting you." She stuck her fingers in the pocket of her jacket, a grayish number with pointed lapels that had seen wear, came out with a purse, and opened it.

I reached to snap it shut. "That can wait. I certainly wouldn't take your money without knowing your name. Of course you can make one up."

"Why should I?" She gestured. "All right. My name is Mira Holt.

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Mira with an I." She opened the purse again.

"Hold it," I told her. "A couple of questions. The dead woman she finds in the cab—does she recognize her?"

"No, how could she?"

"She could if she knew her when she was alive."

"She didn't."

"Good. That helps. You say she left her empty cab to go into a building for something. For what?"

"Oh, just anything. I don't know. That doesn't matter."

"It might, but if you don't know you can't tell me. I want to make it clear, Miss Holt, that I accept without question all that you have told me. Since I am a trained detective I am chronically suspicious, but you are so frank and intelligent and pleasing to look at that I wouldn't dream of doubting you. A man who was sap enough to size you up wrong might even suspect you of feeding him a phony, and go and take a look in that taxi, but not me. I don't even ask you where the driver is, because I assume he has gone to the corner for a ham on rye and a cuppa coffee. In short, I trust you fully. That's understood?"

Her lips were tight. She was probably frowning, but the beak of her cap screened her brow. "I guess so." She wasn't at all sure. "But maybe—if that's how you feel—maybe it would be better just to—"

"No. It's better like this. Much better. About this situation your friend thought up and claims she won the bet, it has many aspects. You say you didn't know enough about what you're supposed to do when you find a dead body. First and foremost, you're supposed to notify the police immediately. That goes for everybody, but it's a must for a private detective—me, for instance—if he wants to keep his license. Is that clear?"

"Yes." She nodded. "I see."

"Also you're not supposed to touch the body or anything near it. Also you're not supposed to leave it unguarded, but that's not so important because you may have to in order to call a cop. As for your idea that all she has to do is get the body out of the cab, and where would she go to ditch it, and would she have to wait until late at night, and so on, I admit it has possibilities and I could make a lot of practical suggestions. But you have to show that it could be done without danger, and that's too big an order. That's what licks you. Forget it. However, your friend hasn't won the bet. She was to produce a situation showing that a woman cab driver runs special risks as a hackie, and in this case the danger comes because she was *not* driving the cab."

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"That's no help. You know very well—"

"Shut up. I beg your pardon."

Her fingers were curled into fists again. "You said you could make some practical suggestions."

"I was carried away. The idea of disposing of a dead body is fascinating as long as it's only an idea. By the way, I took one thing for granted that I shouldn't have—that your friend specified that the woman had died by violence. If she could have died of natural causes—"

"No. She had been stabbed. There was a knife, the handle of a knife . . . ."

"Then it's impossible. A hackie letting someone else drive his cab is a misdemeanor, and so is driving a cab without a license, but driving off with a dead body with a knife sticking in it, and dumping it somewhere, and not reporting it—that's a felony. Good for at least a year and probably more."

She opened a fist to grip my arm, leaning to me. "But not if she did it right! Not if no one ever knew! I told you one thing wrong—she *did* recognize her! She *did* know her when she was alive! So she can't—"

"Hold it," I growled. "Give me some money quick. Pay me. A dollar bill, five—don't sit and stare. See that police car? If it goes on by—no, it's stopping—pay me!"

She was going to panic. She started up, but my hand on her shoulder stopped her and held her down. She opened the purse and took out folded bills without fumbling, and I took them and put them in my pocket. "Staring is okay," I told her, not too loud. "People stare at police cars. Stay put and keep your mouth shut. I'm going to take a look. Naturally I'm curious."

That was perfectly true. I *was* curious. The prowl car had stopped alongside the taxi, and a cop, not the one who was driving, had got out and circled around to the door of the taxi on his side and was opening it as I reached the sidewalk. When you have a reputation for cheek you should live up to it, so I crossed to the door on my side and pulled it open. The seat was empty, but in front of it was a spread of brown canvas held up by whatever was under it.

The cop, lifting a corner of the canvas, snarled at me, "Back up, you," and I retreated half a step, but he hadn't said to close the door, so I had a good view when he pulled the canvas off. More light would have helped, but there was enough to see that it was a woman, or had been, and that the knife whose handle was perpendicular to her ribs was all the way in.

"My God," I said with feeling.

"Shut that door!" the cop barked. "No, don't touch it!"

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"I already have."

"I saw you. Beat it! No! What's your name?"

"Goodwin. Archie Goodwin. This is Nero Wolfe's house, and—"

"I know it is. And I know about you. Is this your cab?"

"Certainly not. I'm not a hackie."

"I know you're not. I mean—" He stopped. Apparently he had realized that the function of a prowl cop on finding a corpse is not to argue with onlookers. His head jerked around. "Climb out, Bill. DOA. I'll call in." The cop behind the wheel wiggled out, and the one in command wiggled in, and I mounted the stoop and sat down beside my client, noting that she had removed the cap and apparently had stashed it.

I kept my voice low, though it wasn't necessary since the cop was talking on his radio. "In about eight minutes," I said, "experts will begin arriving. They will not be strangers to me. Since as far as I know you merely came to get me to tell you how to win a bet, when they start asking questions I'll be glad to answer them if you want to leave it to me. I've had practise answering questions."

She was gripping my arm again. "You looked in. You saw—"

"Shut up, and I don't beg your pardon. You talk too much. Even if I still lived and worked here we wouldn't go inside because it wouldn't be natural, with cops in a prowl car finding a corpse in a taxi parked at the curb—oh, I haven't mentioned that there's a dead woman in the taxi. I mention it now because naturally I would, and naturally I would stick around to watch developments. I'm talking to keep you from talking, since naturally we would talk. Not only have I had practise answering questions, but I know some of the rules. There are only three methods that are any good in the long run. You have strong fingers."

"I'm sorry." Her grip relaxed a little, but she held on. "What are the three methods?"

"One: button your lip. Answer nothing whatever. Two: tell the truth straight through. The works. Three: tell a simple basic lie with no trimmings, and stick to it. If you try a fancy lie, or a mixture of truth and lies, or part of the truth but try to save some, you're sunk. Of course I'm just talking to pass the time. In the present situation, as far as I know, there is no reason why you shouldn't just tell the truth."

"You said to leave it to you."

"Yes, but they won't. There are very few people in their jurisdiction they wouldn't rather leave it to than me, on account of certain—here they come. We can stop talking. Naturally we would watch."

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An official car I had seen before rolled to a stop behind the prowl car, and Inspector Cramer of Homicide West climbed out.

If you are surprised that an Inspector had come in response to a report that a corpse had been found, I wasn't. The report had of course given the location, in front of 918 West 35th Street, and that address held memories, most of them sour, for the personnel at Homicide West, from Cramer down. A violent death that was in any way connected with Nero Wolfe made them itch, and presumably the report had included the item that Archie Goodwin had stuck his nose in.

My client and I watched the routine activities from our grandstand seat. They were swift, efficient, and thorough. Traffic was detoured at the corner of Ninth Avenue. A section of the street and sidewalk was roped off to enclose the taxi. Floodlights were focused on the taxi and surroundings. A photographer took shots from various angles. Pedestrians from both directions were shunted across the street, where a crowd gathered behind the rope. Some twenty city employees, in uniform and out, were on the scene in less than half an hour after the cop had made the radio call—five of them known to me by name and four others by sight.

A second floodlight had just been turned on when Cramer came around the front of the taxi, crossed to the steps, mounted the first three, and faced me. Since I was sitting, that made our eyes level.

"All right," he said. "Let's go in. I might as well have you and Wolfe together, and this woman too. That may simplify it. Open the door."

"On the contrary," I said, not moving, "it would complicate it. Mr. Wolfe is in the office reading a book and knows nothing of all the excitement, and cares less. If I went in and told him you wanted to see him, and what about, you know what he would say and so do I. Nothing doing."

"Who came here in that taxi?"

"I don't know. I know nothing whatever about the taxi. When I came out it was there at the curb."

"When did you come out?"

"Twenty minutes past nine."

"Why did you come out?"

"To find a place to spend the night. I have quit my job, so if you're determined to see Mr. Wolfe you'll have to ring the bell."

"You're telling me you've *quit*?"

"Right. I don't work here any more."

"By God. I thought you and Wolfe had tried all the wrinkles there are, but this is a new one.

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Do you expect me to buy it?"

"It's not a wrinkle. I meant it. I wouldn't sign a pledge never to sleep here again—that depends on Mr. Wolfe's handling of a certain problem; but when I left the house I meant it. The problem has no connection with that taxi or what's in it."

"Did this woman leave the house with you?"

"No. When I opened the door, coming out, she was coming up the stoop. She said she wanted to see Nero Wolfe, and when I told her I no longer worked for him, and anyway he probably wouldn't see her, she said she guessed that for what she wanted I would be better than him. She offered to pay me fifty dollars for consultation on how to win a bet she had made, and we sat here to consult. We had been here fifteen or twenty minutes when the prowl car came along and stopped by the taxi, which had been standing there when I left the house, and naturally I was curious and went to take a look. The cop asked me my name and I told him. When he went to his radio to report I came back to my client, but we didn't do much consulting on account of the commotion. That's the crop."

"Had you ever seen this woman before?"

"No."

"What was the bet she wanted to consult about?"

"That's her affair. She's here. Ask her."

"Did she come in that taxi?"

"Not to my knowledge. Ask her."

"Did you see her get out of the taxi?"

"No. She was halfway up the stoop when I opened the door."

"Did you see anyone get out of the taxi? Or near it?"

"No."

"What's her name?"

"Ask her."

His head moved. "Is your name Judith Bram?"

That was no news for me, since my view through the open door had included the framed picture of the hackie and her name. As well as I had been able to tell in the dim light, the picture was not of my client.

"No," she said.

"What is it?"

"Mira Holt. Mira with an I."

"Did you drive that taxi here?"

"No."

"Did you come here in it?"

"No."

So she had picked Method Three: a simple basic lie.

"Did you have an appointment to see Nero Wolfe?"

"No."

"Where do you live?"

"Seven-fourteen East Eighty-first Street."

"What is your occupation?"

"Modeling. Mostly fashion modeling."

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"Are you married?"

"Yes, but I don't live with my husband."

"What's your husband's name?"

She opened her mouth and closed it again. "Waldo Kearns. I use my own name."

"Are you divorced?"

"No."

"Was that taxi here when you arrived?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice, but I suppose it was because it didn't come after we sat down."

"How did you come here?"

"I don't think that matters."

"I'll decide if it matters. How did you come?"

She shook her head. "No. For instance, if somebody drove me here, or near here, you would ask him, and I might not want you to. No."

So she also knew what "no trimmings" meant.

"I advise you," Cramer advised her, "to tell me how you came."

"I would rather not."

"What was the bet you wanted to consult about?"

"That doesn't matter either. It was a private bet with a friend." Her head turned. "You're a detective, Mr. Goodwin, so you ought to know: do I have to tell him about my private affairs just because I was sitting here with you?"

"Of course not," I assured her. "Not unless he shows some connection between your private affairs and his public affairs, and he hasn't. It's entirely up to you whether—"

"What the devil is all this?" Nero Wolfe bellowed.

I twisted around and so did my client. The door was wide open and he was standing on the threshold, his bulk towering above us. "What's going on?" he demanded.

Since I was merely an ex-employee and Cramer was an Inspector I thought it fitting to let him reply, but he didn't. Apparently he was too flabbergasted at seeing Wolfe actually stick his nose outdoors. Wolfe advanced a step. "Archie. I asked a question."

I had stood up. "Yes, sir, I heard you. Miss Holt, this is Mr. Wolfe. Miss Mira Holt. When I left the house she was coming up the steps. I had never seen her before. When I told her I was no longer in your employ she said I would be better than you and asked to consult me. She has paid me. We sat down to confer. There was an empty taxi parked at the curb, no driver in it. A police car came along and stopped, and a cop found a dead body, female, in the taxi under a piece of canvas. I was there looking in when he removed the canvas.

"I came back up the stoop to sit with my client. We recessed our conference to watch the pro-

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ceedings. Officers arrived promptly, including Inspector Cramer. When he got around to it he came and questioned us. I knew nothing about the taxi or its contents and said so. She told him she had not driven the taxi here and hadn't come in it. She gave him her name and address and occupation, but refused to answer questions about her private affairs—for instance, what she was consulting me about. I was telling her that was entirely up to her when you appeared."

Wolfe grunted. "Why didn't you bring Miss Holt inside?"

"Because it's not my house. Or my office."

"Nonsense. There is the front room. If you wish to stand on ceremony I invite you to use it for consultation with your client. Sitting here in this hubbub is absurd. Have you any further information for Mr. Cramer?"

"No."

"Have you, Miss Holt?"

She was on her feet beside me. "I didn't have any," she said. "I haven't got any."

"Then get away from this turmoil. Come in."

Cramer found his tongue. "Just a minute." He had come on up to the stoop and was at my elbow, focused on Wolfe. "This is all very neat. Too damn neat. Goodwin says he quit his job. Did he?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Pfui. That's egregious, Mr. Cramer, and you know it."

"Did it have anything to do with Miss Holt or what she was coming to consult about?"

"No."

"Or with the fact that a taxi was parked at your door with a dead body in it?"

"No."

"Did you know Miss Holt was coming?"

"No. Nor, patently, did Mr. Goodwin."

"Did you know the taxi was out here?"

"No. I am bearing with you, sir. You persist beyond reason. If Mr. Goodwin or I were involved in the circumstance that brought you here, or Miss Holt, would he have sat here with her, awaiting your assault? You know him, and you know me. Come, Archie. Bring your client." He turned.

I told Cramer, "I'll be glad to type up statements and bring them down," touched Mira Holt's arm, and followed her inside, Wolfe having preceded us.

When I had shut the door and the lock had clicked, Wolfe spoke. "Since there's no telephone in the front room and you may have occasion to use one, perhaps the office would be better. I will go to my room."

"Thank you," I said politely. "But it might be still better for

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us to leave the back way. You may not want us here when I explain the situation. Miss Holt drove that taxi here. A friend of hers named Judith Bram is one of the ninety-three female hackies in New York, and she let Miss Holt take her cab—or maybe Miss Holt took it without Miss Bram's knowledge. She left—"

"No," Mira said. "Judy let me take it."

"Possible," I conceded. "You're a pretty good liar. Let me finish. She left it, empty, in front of a building and went in the building for something, and when she came back there was a dead body in it, a woman, with a knife between its ribs. Either it was covered with a canvas, or she—"

"I covered it," Mira said. "It was under that panel by the driver's seat."

"She's level-headed," I told Wolfe. "Somewhat. She couldn't notify the police, because not only had she and her friend violated the law, but also she had recognized the dead woman. She knew her. She decided to come and consult you and me. I met her on the stoop. She told me a cockeyed tale about a bet she had made with a friend which I'll skip. I said *somewhat* level-headed. I let her see that I knew she was feeding me soap but kept her from blurting it out. So I told Cramer no lies, but she did, and did a good job. But the lies won't keep long. It's barely possible that Judith Bram will deny that she let someone take her cab, but sooner or later—"

"I tried to phone her," Mira said, "but she didn't answer. I was going to tell her to say that someone stole it."

"Quit interrupting me. Did you ever hear of fingerprints? Did you see them working on that cab? So I have a client who is in a double-breasted jam. I'll know more about it after she tells me things. The point is, did she kill that woman? If I thought she did I would bow out quick—I would already have bowed out because it would have been hopeless. But she didn't. One will get you ten that she didn't. If she had—"

That interruption wasn't words; it was her lips against mine and her palms covering my ears. If she had been Wolfe's client I would have shoved her off quick, since that sort of demonstration only ruffles him, but she was mine and there was no point in hurting her feelings. I even patted her shoulder. When she was through I resumed.

"If she had killed her she would not have driven here with the corpse for a passenger to tell you, or even me, a goofy tale about a bet with a friend. Not a chance. She would have dumped the corpse somewhere. Make it twenty to one. Add to that my observa-

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tion of her while we sat there on the stoop, and it's thirty to one. Therefore I am keeping the fee she paid me, and I'm—by the way." I reached in my pocket for the bills she had given me, unfolded them, and counted. Three twenties, three tens, and a five. Returning two twenties and a ten to my pocket, I offered her the rest. "Your change. I'm keeping fifty."

She hesitated, then took it. "I'll pay you more. Of course. What are you going to do?"

"I'll know better after you answer some questions. One that shouldn't wait: what did you do with the cap?"

"I have it." She patted her front.

"Good." I returned to Wolfe. "So we'll be going. Thank you again for your offer of hospitality, but Cramer may be ringing the bell any minute. We'll go out the rear, Miss Holt. This way."

"No." Wolfe snapped it. "This is preposterous. Give me half of that fifty dollars."

I raised a brow. "For what?"

"To pay me. You have helped me with many problems; surely I can help you with one. I am not being quixotic. I do not accept your headstrong decision that our long association has ended, but even if it has, your repute is inextricably involved with mine. Your client is in a pickle. I have never tried to do a job without your help; why should you try to do one without mine?"

I wanted to grin at him, but he might have misunderstood. "Okay," I said, and got a twenty from the pocket where I had put the fee, and a five from my wallet, and handed them to him. He took them, turned, and headed for the office, and Mira and I followed.

Where to sit was a delicate question—not for Wolfe, who of course went to his oversized custom-built chair behind his desk, or for the client, since Wolfe wiggled a finger to indicate the red leather chair that would put her facing him, but for me. The desk at right angles to Wolfe's was no longer mine. I had a hand on one of the yellow chairs, to move it up, when Wolfe growled, "Confound it, don't be frivolous. We have a job to do."

I went and sat where I had belonged, and asked him, "Do I proceed?"

"Certainly."

I looked at her. In good light, with the cap off, she was very lookable, even in a pickle. "I would like," I said, "to be corroborated. Did you kill that woman?"

"No. *No!*"

"Okay. Out with it. This time, Method Two: the truth. Judith Bram is a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"Did she let you take her cab?"

"Yes."

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"Why?"

"I asked her to."

"Why did you ask her to?"

"Because . . . it's a long story."

"Make it as short as you can. We may not have much time."

She was on the edge of the chair, which would have held two of her. "I have known Judy three years. She was a model too, but she didn't like it. She's very unconventional. She had money she had inherited, and she bought a cab and a license about a year ago. She cruises when she feels like it, but she has some regular customers who think it's chic to ride in a cab with a girl driver, and my husband is one of them. He often—"

"Your husband?" Wolfe demanded. "*Miss* Holt?"

"They don't live together," I told him. "Not divorced, but she uses her own name. Fashion model. Go ahead but keep it short."

She obeyed. "My husband's name is Waldo Kearns. He paints pictures but doesn't sell any. He has money. He often calls Judy to take him somewhere, and he called last night when I was with her and told her to come for him at eight o'clock this evening, and I asked Judy to let me go instead of her. I have been trying to see him for months, to have a talk with him, and he refuses to see me. He doesn't answer my letters. I want a divorce and he doesn't. I think the reason he doesn't is that—"

"Skip it. Get on."

"Well . . . Judy said I could take the cab, and today at seven o'clock I went to her place and she brought it from the garage, and she gave me her cap and jacket, and I drove it to—"

"Where is her place?"

"Bowdoin Street. Number seventeen. In the Village."

"I know. You got in the cab there?"

"Yes. I drove it to Ferrell Street. It's west of Varick and below—"

"I know where it is."

"Then you know it's a dead end. Close to the end is an alley that goes betweeen walls to a little house. That's my husband's. I lived there with him about a year. I got there a little before eight, and turned around and parked in front of the alley. Judy had said she always waited for him there. He didn't come. I didn't want to go to the house, because as soon as he saw me he would shut the door on me, but when he hadn't come at half-past eight I got out and went—"

"You're sure of the time?"

"Yes. I looked at my watch. Of course."

"What does it say now?"

She lifted her wrist. "Two minutes after eleven."

"Right. You went through the alley?"

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"Yes, to the house. There's a brass knocker on the door, no bell. I knocked with it, but nobody came. I knocked several times. I could hear the radio or television going inside, I could just barely hear it, so I knocked loud. He couldn't have recognized me through a window because it was too dark and I had the cap pulled down. Of course it could have been Morton, his man as he calls him, playing the radio, but I don't think so because he would have heard the knocker and come to the door.

"I finally gave up and went back to the cab, and as I was getting in I saw her. At first I thought it was a trick he had played, but when I looked closer I saw the knife, and then I recognized her, and she was dead. If I hadn't turned around and gripped the wheel as hard as I could I think I would have fainted. I never have fainted. I sat there—"

"Who was it?"

"It was Phoebe Arden. She was the reason my husband didn't want a divorce. I'm sure she was, or anyway one of the reasons. I think he thought that as long as he was still married to me she couldn't expect him to marry her, and neither could anyone else. But I wasn't thinking about that while I sat there, I was thinking what to do. I knew the right thing was to call the police, but I was driving Judy's cab, and, what was worse, I would have to admit I knew who she was, and they would find out about her and my husband. I don't know how long I sat there."

"It must have beeen quite a while. You left the cab to go to the house at eight thirty. How long were you gone?"

"I don't know. I knocked several times, and looked in at the windows, and then knocked some more." She considered. "At least ten minutes."

"Then you were back at the cab at eight forty, and from there to here wouldn't take more than ten minutes, and you got here at nine twenty. Did you sit there half an hour?"

"No. I decided to get her—to get it out of the cab. I found that canvas under the panel. I thought the best place would be somewhere along the riverfront, and I drove there but didn't see a good place, and men tried to stop me twice, and once when I stopped for a light a man opened the door and when I told him I was making a delivery he almost climbed in anyway. Then I thought I would just leave the cab somewhere, anywhere, and I went to a phone booth to call Judy and tell her to say the cab had been stolen, but there was no answer. Then I thought of Nero Wolfe and you, and I drove here. I didn't have much time

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to make that up about the bet; just on my way here. I knew it wasn't much good while I was telling it."

"So did I." I was frowning at her. "I want you to realize one thing. I believe you when you say you didn't kill her, but it doesn't follow that I swallow you whole. For instance, the divorce situation. If the fact is that your husband wanted one so he could marry Phoebe Arden, and you balked, that would be different."

"No." She was frowning back. "I've told you the truth, every word. I lied to you out there, but if I lied to you now, I'd be a fool."

"You sure would. How good a friend of yours is Judy Bram?"

"She's my best friend. She's a little wild, but I like her. I love her."

"Are you sure she rates it?"

"Yes."

"You'd better cross your fingers." I turned to Wolfe. "Since you're helping on this, and I fully appreciate it, our minds should meet. Do you accept it that she didn't kill her?"

"As a working hypothesis, yes."

"Then isn't it likely that she was killed by someone who knew that Miss Holt would be driving the cab?"

"Likely, but far from certain. The embarrasssment could have been meant for Miss Bram, not for Miss Holt."

I returned to Mira. "How close are Judy Bram and your husband?"

"Close?" The frown was getting chronic. "They aren't close. If you mean intimate, I doubt if Judy has ever allowed any man to be intimate. My husband may have tried. I suppose he has."

"Could Judy have had any reason to kill Phoebe Arden?"

"Good lord, no."

"Isn't it possible that Judy, unknown to you, had got an idea that she would like to break the ice with your husband, and Phoebe Arden was in the way?"

"I suppose it is, if you want to say that anything is possible, but I don't believe it."

"You heard what I asked Mr. Wolfe and what he answered: I still like it that whoever killed her knew that you were going to drive the cab there. It's certainly possible that Judy Bram told someone."

"Yes, it's possible, but I don't believe it. Judy wouldn't. She just wouldn't."

"It's also possible that you told someone. Did you?"

Her lips twitched. Twice. Two seconds. "No," she said.

"You're lying. I haven't time to be polite. You're lying. Whom did you tell?"

"I'm not going to say. The person I told couldn't possibly have... have done anything. Some things are *not* possible."

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"Who was it?"

"No, Mr. Goodwin. Really."

I got the twenty and ten from my pocket and twenty from my wallet, got up, and went to her. "Here's your fifty bucks," I said. "Count me out. You can leave the back way."

"But I tell you he couldn't!"

"Then he won't get hurt. I won't bite him. But I've got to know everything you do or it's no good."

Her lips twitched again. "You would really do that? Just give me up?"

"I sure would. I will. With regrets and best wishes."

She breathed. "I phoned a friend last evening and told him. His name is Gilbert Irving."

"Is he more than a friend?"

"No. He is married and so am I. We're friends, that's all."

"Does he know your husband?"

"Yes. They've known each other for years, but they've never been close."

"Did he know Phoebe Arden?"

"He had met her. He didn't *know* her."

"Why did you tell him about your plan to drive the cab?"

"Because I wanted to know what he thought of it. He is very—a very intelligent man."

"What did he think of it?"

"He thought it was foolish. Not foolish exactly, useless. He thought my husband would refuse to listen to me. Honestly, Mr. Goodwin, this *is* foolish. There is absolutely no—"

The doorbell rang. I had taken three steps before I remembered that I no longer worked there; then, not wishing to be frivolous, I continued to the hall and took a look through the one-way glass panel of the front door.

A man and a woman were there on the stoop. A glance was enough to recognize Inspector Cramer, but it took closer inspection for the woman, and I moved down the hall. Even then I wasn't positive, since the light had been dim on the picture of the female hackie in the taxi, but I was sure enough. It was Judith Bram.

(*continued on page 83*)

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One of the oddest crime stories in captivity . . .

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO YOUNG RUSSELL?

by MICHAEL HARRISON

UNCLE PERCY, THIRTY-EIGHT, unmarried good-looking in an ordinary sort of way, with a good job and an assured future, could afford to be tolerant, even of his irritating young nephew, Teddy Russell.

"I'm never in England long enough to have to take sides," he would explain to his friends, who were mostly to be found in the more expensive bars. "And I'm off and away long before any of the awkward results of my conscienceless generosity—if that's the right phrase—can develop."

"Conscienceless?"

"Well, I'm thinking in particular of my young nephew, Teddy. What he really needs, of course, is a damned good hiding, but he's not ever likely to get it from his silly, doting mother—my brother's widow; and why the devil should I get involved with a little toad whom I see only once a year or so?

"I don't give a damn about *his* enmity, but I'd simply be involving myself in endless and pointless arguments with Mary—my sister-in-law. Poor woman, she's got enough to do as it is, without having to defend her little brute against me. Well, anyway, that's what I meant when I spoke of my generosity as 'conscienceless.' I help her out a bit with the bills, and I bribe my way into the little beast's good graces. Sometimes I feel a bit of a cad, buying peace, and leaving it to Mary to clear up the mess; but after all, she's his mother, and I'm not. And as soon as I get back to Canada I try not to think about either of them."

"What luck to be a bachelor!"

"Yes, indeed. It certainly has its compensations. For one thing, no woman ever says a harsh word to you, except behind your back. Being an unmarried uncle's all right, too. You are always welcome; you give presents all round; you listen to the family troubles, give whatever damfool advice

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comes into your head, clear out, take no responsibility, and still be quite sure of a warm welcome whenever you decide to drop in on the family again!"

Percy Russell, like all thoroughly selfish people, was highly adaptable in society and commanded all the more shallow social graces. He could play a good game of bridge, poker, billiards, pool, or backgammon; he could ride, shoot, play golf. He could also attract children—even so unlikable a child as his nephew, Teddy.

Percy knew that his sister-in-law, Mary, had mentally solved almost all her problems with the one perfect solution—marriage to Percy. But, quite apart from the fact that Mary was not his type, Percy was not at all the self-sacrificing sort. He would never have married any woman in order to make her life a little easier.

All the same, Percy came as near to pitying her as his selfish nature permitted whenever he considered what life would be, over the unimaginable years ahead, with Teddy as a son.

It was not just that Teddy was a particularly disagreeable little boy— Percy knew plenty of disagreeable little boys, especially in these days when parents seemed to have lost control over their children. Teddy was disobedient, and usually consented to turn off the television and go to bed only after the broadcasting had ended for the night.

"I simply don't know what to do!" Mary complained. "I'm sure it isn't good for his eyes—and yet he makes such a *scene* if I don't let him watch."

"Is it your set or do you rent it?"

"I rent it."

"Then send it back. Better still, don't pay the rental and they'll jolly soon repossess it. Easy! Problem solved. The little beas- . . .er, Teddy can't watch if there's no set to look at."

Mary seemed doubtful. "He wouldn't like it."

Percy suppressed the strong words rising to his lips. He contented himself with a shrug. Why worry—he'd be back in Vancouver in a week.

"There is that," he remarked.

But Teddy, his uncle noticed, was not merely nasty in what might be called "ordinary" ways—ways in which most children were nasty at one time or another—except that Teddy did all these things both more frequently and more thoroughly. Most children at one time or another are disobedient, contradictory, lazy, cruel, greedy, and so on. But there was something in Teddy's nastiness which took him beyond ordinary nastiness; there was something, Percy conceded, not only individual but—well, more decidedly original. Teddy was

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eight. Percy shuddered to think what the little toad would be like at eighteen.

Seeing his brother's widow only once a year, and writing only as often as good manners rather than warm heart dictated, Percy Russell was obviously in no position to have examined his nephew's character and characteristics in great detail. But there was one characteristic which interested Percy—that is to say, it began by interesting him and soon startled him. As this:

One day—it was a wet, grim day in an unfashionable London suburb—all three were looking out of the window of Mary's apartment. Across the wet, gray, dirty road a middle-aged, overweight dog began to make its way.

"Oh," said Mary, "that's Mrs. Brogan's poor old Charlie! Oh, I *do* hope he doesn't get himself run over!"

Teddy said, "I hope he *does* get run over."

Mary said absently, "Oh, Teddy, *what* a thing to say!"

But the odd thing was that Mrs. Brogan's poor old Charlie was run over. Certainly the dog hadn't seen the car appear, as if from nowhere; but then, Percy wondered, neither had he seen it. At one moment the road was clear; at the next, a fast car was running over the dog.

Percy dismissed the accident as —well, an accident.

Until the business of Mrs. Turner's brandy.

Mrs. Turner had called on Mary to borrow a book; and Mary, looking at her friend's bulging string-bag, said, "Are you sure that bag's strong enough? Shall I lend you one? You've got a bottle of brandy there, too. It would be a pity if you break it."

"No, dear," said Mrs. Turner. "The bag's far stronger than it looks."

As Mrs. Turner went down in the elevator, Mary said, "Oh, I do hope she manages to get those things home without the bag breaking!"

Teddy said, "I hope the bag breaks and the bottle falls out as she comes out of the front entrance."

As usual, Mary said, "Oh, Teddy, you mustn't *say* such things!"

All the same, Mrs. Turner's bag *did* break, and, what's more, the bottle of brandy smashed on the steps of the front entrance.

What made it so odd, Percy reflected, was that Teddy did not appear to connect these random ill-washings with their coincidental results. He said these malicious things and was usually g o n e before the wished-for catastrophe happened.

When the old dog had been run over, Percy had turned away from the window to find that Teddy had wandered off to the

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other side of the room, to start breaking a toy train his mother had given him for Christmas. Teddy, at least, was not impressed by these coincidences.

But Percy was—and even more so after the affair of Mr. Rajasawmy's assassination.

Mr. Motilal Rajasawmy, you may remember, was the eminent Indian statesman whose political activites had taken him away from his native land at an early age and never permitted him to return. After a fiery youth as a student in London he had ended up as one of the ambassadors at the United Nations headquarters. Another young Indian, jealous perhaps of all the good things that Motilal Rajasawmy's noisy posturings had brought him, shot him on the steps of the White House, as he was about to call on the President of the United States. The other Indian had succeeded only in wounding Mr. Rajasawmy, but it was a touch-and-go thing, said the BBC's political commentator, speaking from Washington.

The commentator was sitting at a desk; behind him was a blownup photograph of the White House. It wasn't easy to hear what he was saying, for his solemnly hushed voice—"brought to you by Satellite"—was far too full of what the electrical engineers call "fruit." Still, one gathered that, though wounded, Mr. Rajasawmy, attended by the President's personal physician, had a good hope of recovery. "The whole world joins with the Prime Minister," said the commentator, "in wishing well to Mr. Rajasawmy. Her Majesty the Queen has sent her personal—"

"Oh, I *hope* he doesn't die!" said Mary, in whom this sort of happening always produced the predictable reaction.

Teddy said, "I hope he *does* die. I hope he dies *this very minute*."

Mary said perfunctorily, "Oh, Teddy, you mustn't *say* things like that!"

The television was still switched on, and it was with a decidedly hair-raising feeling that Percy heard the commentator say, "Just a minute, please! A flash has just come through. This may be an important message. One moment, please!"

The commentator picked up the telephone standing on his desk, listened with appropriate gravity, nodded even more gravely, replaced the receiver, and said, "That was a message from the White House news staff. I regret to say that Mr. Rajasawmy died only a few minutes ago."

Percy looked around for Teddy. He was sitting on the floor, penciling mustaches on the full-color reproductions of Rembrandt's most famous paintings. Percy had given Mary the book after they

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had gone to the Rembrandt Exhibition at Burlington House.

"Oh, *please* don't spoil my book!" Mary cried snatching the volume up, but not so quickly that Teddy did not manage to tear a page loose. "Oh, my *nice* book!"

Percy usually said at this point, for Teddy was a renowned book mutilator, "Oh, don't worry. I'll get you another."

But this time a chill thought had entered Percy's mind, and for once he did not respond to Mary's fragile indignation.

"Isn't it about time you got off to bed, young fellow-me-lad?"

Percy rattled half crowns in his pocket, to make the suggestion more palatable to Teddy.

"I don't mind," the boy said grudgingly.

Mary said jealously, "I wish I could get round him the way *you* do!"

"Oh, " said Percy indulgently, "Teddy and I understand each other, don't we? Kiss your Mother, Teddy, and then off to Bedfordshire, eh? Here's five bob to buy yourself something the next time you go shopping."

"Say, 'Thank you, Uncle Percy.' "

"Thank you, Uncle Percy."

"I'm sure I don't know how you *do* it, Percy! Why won't he go to bed when *I* ask him—without a lot of trouble?"

"Because," said Percy, aware that his heart was beating a little too violently for comfort, but hoping that Teddy, of all people, wouldn't sense his agitation, "Teddy's a big boy now."

Teddy looked pleased. Mary echoed: "A big boy? Why, he's only eight—"

"Ah, in one way, yes, Mary. But Teddy's not a little cry baby any more. Not full of silly ideas about who—or what—could be upstairs waiting for him!"

Mary said indignantly, "Percy! What's come over you? Why, you'll frighten the poor child out of his wits!"

"Not Teddy I won't!" said Uncle Percy. "Teddy's a sensible lad. He knows there's not a great big horrible monster waiting in his bedroom."

Habit was too strong. Teddy could respond to only so much flattery. He said spitefully, "You're wrong! There *is* a great big horrible monster waiting for me in my bedroom."

He opened the door and blundered upstairs.

On the landing he stopped to shout, "There *is*! There *is* a great big horr-

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a NEW spy story by

R. BRETNOR

Have you had your fill perhaps of spy-and-counterspy stories? Well, whether you have had or not, here is one guaranteed to be absolutely "different." No violence, no rough-and-tumble promiscuity, no melodramatic derring-do, no cynicism, no "Life is real! Life is earnest!"—just the darnedest gentle, genteel pre-World War I spy story you've ever read—and a perfect delight even if you don't know one gun from another . . .

THE GREATEST OF ALL WEBLEY COLLECTORS

by R. BRETNOR

The Royal Naval Club,
Portsmouth,
22nd May, 1968

My dear James,

Please accept my congratulations; you are a lucky young man. Kitty is not only my favourite grandaughter, she is, as you know, the loveliest girl in the world. Actually, when I first heard she was marrying a barbarian out of Montana—forgive me, but I know very well that you all wear hairy chaps and eat bear steaks for breakfast—I feared for her welfare. But when I found you in the pergola reading *The Webley Story*, that admirable book of Major Dowell's, and learned you were collecting Webleys yourself, I realised that civilization had penetrated further west than I had believed. Therefore now, instead of insulting you with my grandfatherly disapproval, all I can do is inflict on you my advice, which, because of my long and intimate acquaintance with Webley revolvers, the Webley works, and The Greatest of All Webley Collectors, will be absolutely invaluable to you.

You may recall that, at first, you had some idea of being what you called a "completist" Webley

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collector, but that you had sensibly given up this impossible goal even before meeting me, settling for one which seemed more practical to you—that of a complete collection of Webley-Fosbery automatic revolvers. I assure you, my boy, that the second goal is no more practical than the first, for reasons which I shall make clear to you. Though not more than 5000 of Colonel Fosbery's revolvers ever were made, it would be simply impossible to acquire one of each type, for of some types there weren't many more than that.

Let me give you an instance. A compatriot of yours in Louisiana, an avid collector, owns Number 5. It was retailed by Oakes & Co. in Madras, and sold to a Lt. Calthrop of the Essex Regiment. It is a .455, but it has a stepped cyclinder like the very scarce .38 ACP, and a few other features which, according to all the authorities, just can't be. And it was turned out long before The Greatest of All Webley Collectors came on the scene.

In 1913, you see, I was a very new junior officer, and I'd had a bout of pneumonia with some strange complications, and my Uncle Cosmo—Vice-Admiral Macnaughton, who I firmly believe could have won Jutland decisively—called me up and offered me this shore-side assignment at Webley's. Everybody knew everybody else in those days, and it made hush-hush matters ever so much easier to arrange.

We had luncheon together in London, and he told me all about The Greatest of All Webley Collectors, though of course we didn't then know that this was what he'd turn out to be. His name, by the way, was Rittmeister Graf Franz-Christian-Waldemar von und zu Hohenhaupt-Trohna, and he was a remarkable chap. He was no common cavalry captain; his commission was in one of their finest Guards regiments, and his family were as proud as the Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns. They owned bleak castles and all sorts of dark forests with wolves in them. He was thirty years old, and he had an impressive higher degree in, of all things, mechanical engineering. He spoke English like a native of Ottawa, having spent several years in a Jesuit school there while his father was off exploring somewhere or other after a thundering great scandal involving a married Swedish princess. Weapons were a hobby of his. You will not be surprised to hear that eventually we became very good friends.

Those were innocent days—pre-World War I. In Berlin we had in our pay a Roumanian Countess, as lovely as any king's mistress and with tastes as expensive. The nobleman to whom

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she was married was incredibly ancient and very broad-minded. Her lover was an Oberst-General von Krott, who not only had the amiable habit of talking in his sleep, but would actually answer her questions without waking up. As he was high in the Imperial General Staff, we rewarded the lady quite handsomely, and it was she, naturally, who put us onto Hohenhaupt-Trohna.

You see, some German officers on the technical side had noticed what you too have observed—that there seemed to be no end to minor variations in Webleys. A single model could have three or four different grips, barrels of assorted lengths and contours, differently fluted cylinders, and goodness knows what. There was no general purpose behind this; partly, I suppose, it was just the skilled British workman's way of kicking back at the machine age. But the Germans, being such logical people, realized only that someone was going to a great deal of bother for no immediately discernible reason, and began to suspect that there was hanky-panky, funny business, a f o o t. They presented their preliminary study to the appropriate section of the Imperial General Staff, and in due course Moltke the Younger and Falkenhayn and people like that became interested, and finally poor Hohenhaupt-Trohna w a s summoned before the top echelon.

Willie himself wasn't there, but the Crown Prince was, a n d everyone looked very stern and important. A f t e r Hohenhaupt-Trohna had saluted, bowed very formally, and r e p o r t e d his presence, von Krott apprised him of the high honour which was to be his.

Von Krott summarised t h e report of their technical people. Over a given number of months, Webley's had produced 74 unexplained variations in barrel dimensions, 16 i n trigger-guard design, 188 in front- and rear-sight silhouette, et cetera, et cetera. Such and such a percentage of these had been observed on purely military types. And so on. The British were a practical people, ruling a vast and profitable Empire. No practical people would waste time and energy to no purpose. Therefore the purpose must be very deep, d a r k, and dangerous. Obviously something was very wrong. It was a matter of maximum urgency.

Hohenhaupt-Trohna apparently tried to suggest that perhaps that was just the way the British did things—after all, he had grown up with our cousins in Canada, but he was promptly set down by von Krott. Then they issued his orders. He was given two weeks to die in—preferably in a hunting accident, which w a s plausible for a horseman. Then he was to endure a few months

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of training for his new job at Webley's—which, of course, they would have neatly arranged. Once settled in, he not only would report in detail on all the unexplained variations, but would ship a specimen of each one to Germany.

Uncle Cosmo, of course, thought the whole thing perfectly wonderful—especially the notion of employing one very junior officer (myself) and a few civilians to keep all sorts of German officers and technical experts expensively and uselessly busy, which was what we were now planning to do.

I used to like to imagine the poor fellow, stiff as a post in his full-dress cuirass and helmet, clicking his heels, saluting, bowing obediently, and going off to embark on his mission. Actually, except for the fancy dress, it was very much like that. He took leave of his regiment, broke off his engagement to a beautiful Baroness whose lineage was as long and involved as his own, and within two weeks he officially perished.

We talked about him occasionally, and made ready to welcome him; and sure enough, six months later he arrived. They were thorough, those Germans. They'd found him a marvellous cover—a chap named Adrian Higgins who'd died on his way back from Russia, where he'd worked a few years, and whose background included British Columbia and even some Jesuits. But I'll quote from my diary, entry of 12th May, 1913:

"Our spy finally arrived this a.m. Coulter and Mr. Whatman both vetted him backwards and forwards, and of course confirmed his employment. Coulter says he seems very competent. His friends have done a good job on him, I must say. Doesn't look a bit like his photograph. No monocle, no cavalry waist. They've fed him up by about forty pounds—probably with "all sorts of abominable sausages," as in Saxo Grammaticus.

"He has a moustache rather like Mr. Kipling's, only raggeder, and the same sort of spectacles. Speaks well, though like a Colonial. Perhaps too well; his manners show through. If we didn't know, I suppose we'd put it all on the Jesuits.

"I offered to help him find rooms, but he said he'd already found some—probably all arranged in advance. Uncle Cosmo tells me I have to be nice to him, and make sure he's happy and comfortable. Well, at least he's just a spy, not a *traitor!*"

During those first three or four months, I'm afraid we gave Mr. "Adrian Higgins" a rather hard time. After a few weeks of breaking in, Mr. L. W. Whatman, the works manager, and John Coulter,

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the foreman of the Revolver and Pistol Department, assigned him to work directly with me in my special project because "he had shown such aptitude for original design." I had one or two very good men under me, and whenever some county gunsmith sent in an order for two dozen of something just a bit different, Coulter brought it to us. Believe me, we solemnly turned out the damnedest things, like one lot of .297/.230 commercial Mark* IV's with *triangular* lanyard rings, and three Fosberys with grip safeties like your .45 automatic.

Every day or so, Coulter would come around with Mr. Whatman or Uncle Cosmo or some army person in mufti, and they'd buzz about very mysteriously. Then we'd get busy designing something even more strangely nonfunctional. Uncle Cosmo had told me not to try to conceal my Royal Navy connection, but to act as though I were trying clumsily to conceal it—it probably would've been spotted immediately anyhow.

Hohenhaupt-Higgins fell in with all this very eagerly. He was a mechanical genius, and mad about weapons; when he was working, he put his whole heart into it. In fact, Coulter once told Uncle Cosmo, when one of our own men had botched half a day's output, that perhaps we ought to write to the German Emperor and ask for twenty such spies instead of trying to hire our workmen in Birmingham.

Before long, we'd conveyed the idea—without really telling him anything—that our business was fantastically hush-hush and *very* important. We knew we'd conveyed it successfully because our Countess informed us in detail after his reports had come in. The next step was obvious—as noted in my diary entry of 28th August, 1913:

"Well, we've promoted Hohenhaupt-Higgins. He's now, in effect, Chief Designer of the Odd and Unnecessary—without the title, of course. Besides the usual commercial jobs, he's been encouraged to give his imagination free rein, with a bonus for each new idea he gives birth to. We have sworn him to secrecy under pain of instant dismissal.

"Uncle Cosmo said yesterday that I mustn't refer to him as 'Hohenhaupt-Higgins' even *in camera;* if I do, I might say it aloud to him and blow the whole thing. I'm to address him as Adrian. 'Your association,' said Uncle Cosmo, 'must ripen into a beautiful friendship for King and for Country.' "

I must say that I didn't like the idea, for he *was* a spy after all. Besides, we were having a wonderful time egging him on. The more he invented, the harder it became for him to send one of each type back to Germany.

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They bought a lot on the open market through agents, but you simply can't do that when there may be only one or two of a type—and to make matters worse, they had him buying or locating a great many made before his arrival. The poor devil was really chasing his tail.

We gave him permission to work long hours overtime, and after everyone else had gone home he'd be down at the works copying whatever there happened to be only one specimen of. He began to get rather haggard after the first couple of months, and we heard that two or three times he'd failed to send them a specimen, and that the Kronprinz and von Krott were very annoyed with him. His sense of duty, of course, made him report all his failures. In spite of it all, he was always helpful and courteous, and as eager as ever; and the respect and affection with which the men treated him became almost fantastic.

It was then, I think, that I began to feel sorry for him. I'd been following Uncle Cosmo's instructions to the letter, and "Adrian" and I had taken to having a pint together whenever we could, or eating supper and playing chess afterwards. At first—because of the social distance between us, which of course was much more serious in those days—we only talked shop, but then we began to exchange reminiscences, mostly about shooting and life in the country. Somehow he fitted everything into Higgin's real background, shifting an incident from his family's forests to Russia's, or explaining how a friend of his father's in the R.C.M.P. had taught him to ride.

When he got on the subject of horses, he really came to life. His eyes flashed—even when he could barely keep their lids open. He laughed. He seemed to forget all his troubles. But these pleasant occasions became less and less frequent as he was forced to drive himself harder and harder, and finally I made up my mind to do something about it. Herewith my entry of 12th October, 1913:

"Today I spoke to Uncle Cosmo about Adrian, going to London just for the purpose. 'Sir,' I said, 'I'm worried about him. We're pushing him too hard. He's likely to come apart on us'

'I doubt that,' Uncle replied, doing ferocious things with his eyebrows. 'He's tough. Besides, if he breaks up it's their loss, not ours.'

" 'That's true, sir,' I said. 'But you told me that his activities here are tying up many of their best technical people, trying to puzzle out what we're up to. If he fizzles out, there'll be the end of it.'

"Uncle Cosmo just grunted.

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'Next I suppose you're going to tell me he's really a very decent sort of chap and wonderfully helpful, is that it?'

"I nodded."

" 'Very well, what would you suggest?'

" 'Sir, couldn't we get that Countess of ours to whisper to General von Krott in his sleep that they don't really need specimens of every *minor* variation—that drawings would do just as well?'

"Uncle Cosmo objected that this might be too risky. He didn't know whether or not von Krott would follow such a suggestion. It would be up to the Countess; if she thought she could manage it safely, then well and good. But at least he agreed to ask her about it. Then he asked me whether I had planned anything else for my spy-pampering program?

" 'Nothing, sir' I told him, 'except to get Adrian some healthy outdoor exercise.' "

At that point, Uncle Cosmo chucked me out rather abruptly, so I had no chance to tell him how I proposed to accomplish this. What I wanted to do was to get Adrian onto the back of a horse, and—bearing in mind the social difficulties—there was only one way I could think of to do it. My Aunt Frances, my mother's and Uncle Cosmo's half-sister, had married beneath her. She had married Will Thacker, a well-to-do farmer who lived nearby, just a few miles from Coventry and scarcely an hour by train out of Birmingham, in some of Warwickshire's best hunting country. Like so many good men of that sort, he kept his own horses and hunted as keenly as Jorrocks. I knew that he'd welcome Hohenhaupt-Higgins without too many questions, especially after he found out how horsey he was.

I really planned it quite cleverly. I'd remembered that the real Adrian's mother had been a clergyman's daughter, and that she had married beneath her. (According to all our reports, she'd never let her husband forget it.) So I broached the subject with great delicacy one day at the pub, distorting the truth only a little. Without mentioning Uncle Cosmo, I spoke of Aunt Frances, and then started to talk about Uncle Will, explaining that he was really a wonderful fellow even if he wasn't quite out of the top drawer

Actually, Hohenhaupt-Higgins's initial reaction was frosty—but this was because he was thinking like Hohenhaupt-Trohna instead of like Adrian Higgins; but as soon as I told him about Will's horses and hunting he began to thaw. I could see him wavering between the absolute discretion that his role seemed to demand and the born horseman's urge to go riding; and eventually the

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horseman won out, as I was sure it would.

I had hoped to get him up to Uncle Will's for the cub-hunting, but that was impossible, for it took the Countess eight weeks to make up her mind—at a cost to us of some hundreds of pounds—that she could risk whispering the message to von Krott in his sleep. Finally, a few days before Christmas, we heard that she'd managed it, and Hohenhaupt-Higgins learned the results almost as quickly as we did. The relief on his face was really a joy to behold. Thenceforward, he was to be allowed to forward drawings (with, of course, precise measurements) of all minor variations. Though this didn't stop him from being The Greatest of All Webley Collectors, it did cut down his collecting by about sixty percent, which made things much easier for him, and relieved my own mind.

It was easy enough to arrange an extra holiday, and off we went in the first week of January. Uncle Will and his daughter, my cousin Alice, met us at Brinklow Station, half a dozen miles this side of Rugby. The three of them took to each other immediately. I was quite pleased about it at the time, not being able to realise that, while it was perfectly genuine all the way round, the communion between Alice and Adrian was very much stronger than one would expect even from the meeting of two such devoted horse-worshippers.

I had always thought Alice a rather strange person. Her nickname was Titmouse, which in those pre-James Bond days was not subject to vulgar misinterpretations. She was a tall girl, not quite twenty, dark blonde, with serious grey eyes and very dark lashes. In a way, I suppose, she was beautiful, and everyone said she was *lissome*, but I always thought of her as loose-jointed—a nice enough kid, but just not my sort.

She rode like a centaur, and one thing which may have prejudiced me was her insufferable habit of calling out to me in the field, using more or less nautical terms: "I say matey, hadn't you better take a reef in those reins?" or "Hard a-port there, mate!" My seat wasn't perfect, but she was much too unkind about it, greeting me with such sallies as "Ah-ha! Here comes the bumboatman!" which I thought vaguely indelicate.

Adrian, however, did not see Titmouse through my eyes. Before we went back to Brummagem, she had obviously become one of the most wonderful things in his world—after Family Honour, Duty, the House of Hohenzollern, and horses, more or less in that order. After supper, on the night we arrived, she took him out to

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the stables and, by lantern-light, introduced him to every one of the horses. They must have whickered and neighed at each other out there for an hour at least; and when they came in, Uncle Will was as pleased as punch. He remarked that my friend really knew horses, that he seemed an awfully nice chap, that he himself often wished that Titmouse might marry a Canadian or Australian and move out where there was still room for a decent gallop—the railways had spoiled everything around here, and the motor cars would inevitably work even more mischief.

But it was not until the next morning, when we joined the hunt at Snitterfield, that I really began to understand what had happened. Ordinarily, like most Europeans, Hohenhaupt-Trohna would probably have been appalled by how democratic the hunt was, with so many of those mounted up clearly not gentry—to say nothing of the strange crew of bumpkins following on foot. But he didn't notice a thing. Titmouse was usually surrounded by a crowd of ardent, more or less eligible, young men; everyone called them "Princess Alice's Own."

Now, however, taking one look at her with our Adrian, they simply melted into the background. He was really magnificent. Once in the saddle, those extra pounds they'd put on him vanished abruptly; his near-sighted stoop disappeared; even the Kipling moustache bristled with a new life of its own. Titmouse had put him aboard a wild-eyed, vicious, iron-mouthed, hammerheaded idiot of a horse who had thrown me twice and bitten me painfully and the brute was behaving as though Adrian was the patron saint of all horses.

It was a lovely morning, crisp and green and fast under a white-flecked canopy of blue—a huntsman's morning. Everything, I suppose, went wonderfully. All I remember of it, though, is a montage of Titmouse and Adrian flying over fences, hedges, ditches, almost hand in hand, and all sorts of people *ohing!* and *ahing!* at the sight, and asking me where I could ever have met such a splendid horseman. Then, as though that weren't bad enough, old Colonel Hetheringbotham began to imagine that he had seen Adrian — or Hohenhaupt-Trohna — somewhere before, which he very well may have, what with his stints as a military attaché and any number of manoeuvers and horse shows on the Continent. However, I told him about Adrian's travels, especially in Russia where he'd come under some strange foreign influences, and the Colonel finally persuaded himself that it wasn't the face, but the *seat* which was so familiar. Still, it disturbed me,

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and I decided to mention it when I made my report on the Adrian-Titmouse situation.

On the train, Adrian surprised me by mentioning her only in passing, usually in connection either with some horse he was interested in or some event of the hunt which he felt needed expert analysis. His manner was incredibly gay, light, and carefree, and he certainly didn't resemble a lover newly and hopelessly smitten. Nor, for that matter, did he resemble a Graf Rittmeister with a higher degree busily spying out a foreign land's supposed military secrets. All in all, I began to feel that perhaps my fears were unwarranted; and next day, when I lunched with my uncle, I told him as much.

"My lad," he chuckled, "you're right. We can judge neither Titmouse nor our Teutonic friend as though they were ordinary people. I doubt if he really sees her at all, or she him. They look *through* each other, but they *see* only horses. No doubt it's quite pleasant for them, but it's nothing for us to worry about. Besides, no *hochgeboren Offizier* in a German Guards regiment *can* fall in love with a farmer's daughter—even the well-brought-up daughter of a farmer as prosperous as Will. It iss *verboten*. It iss alzo against Regulations. Therefore, even if he did fall in love with her, he would not be aware of the fact, and no harm would be done. As for old Hetheringbotham, leave him to me. It'll work out nicely."

And, for a time, it certainly seemed he was right. The Colonel gave us no further trouble, ignoring Adrian completely. We went down to the farm for at least one day of hunting a week, and sometimes, when I could manage it plausibly, for two in succession. It did my heart good to see how happy he was. He and Titmouse continued to get along famously. Instead of whispering s w e e t nothings, they exchanged confidences about hooves and hocks. Instead of sighing and burning and clinging and yearning, they focussed their passion on fences and foxes. They were happy. Uncle Cosmo was happy. I was happy. Only Uncle Will, who had set his sights on a marriage, was a bit disappointed.

For more than two months, it was really idyllic. Von Krott and the Imperial General Staff were delighted with H o h e n h a u p t-Trohna, for their technical people had expressed great satisfaction with the enormous numbers of Webleys he had made available to them for study. So pleased were they that they even approved of his equine pursuits, which were necessary, Adrian explained, so that he might gain the full confidence not only of his immediate superiors at work, but of those mysterious authorities who were

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presumably pulling the strings.

That explanation was a terrible mistake.

It was mid-March when the blow fell, and it came without warning (my diary entry of 17th March, 1914):

"Today Uncle Cosmo sent for me, something he just never does. I caught the first train, and when I reported he really was wearing his Eve of Waterloo look. He had a bottle of brandy and a couple of glasses out on the table.

" 'Well, Gerald,' said he, 'the fat's in the fire.'

" 'Sir?'

"He poured the brandy, and pushed some my way. He had heard from the Countess. The technical people had rendered an impressive report, in three or four hundred pages. They'd analysed 1138 Webley revolvers, including some made as far back as the 'eighties, and nearly 200 self-loading pistols. They had documented all the measurements, all the variations, and had set forth their own speculations, giving the pros and cons for each one. And they had reached a conclusion—

"Uncle Cosmo swallowed his brandy, and I followed suit. The conclusion was simple: they could not solve the riddle. They had been denied materials for study; they had, in *x* many cases, received only drawings instead of the actual weapons involved!

"The report has been *accepted,* and an order has been written telling poor Adrian that he not only must go back to sending one of each kind, but that he'll have to find specimens of all those not previously sent!"

Well, my uncle agreed that we had to do *something*—not, he said gruffly, because of any consideration for the spy in our midst, but to keep the whole project from being washed down the drain; and he finally decided, after we'd thrashed it around, that von Krott needed another flea in his ear.

So he instructed the Countess to suggest to her lover that the riddle wasn't one for the technical people at all, that it involved the Empire and the psychological subtleties of its strange and assorted Native races, and that a really massive espionage effort by ethnologists and other such experts was called for.

"That," he said, "ought to do it, even if it does cost us money. They'll order our friend back to der Vaterland—then they'll start wasting even more men and energy than before."

"Titmouse will be awfully upset," I suggested.

"Nonsense, my boy. She may weep for a while, but then she'll find someone equally horsey, and British to boot."

Well, I wasn't so sure about that, but it was by no means the worst of my worries. The

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Countess was slow—I imagine there was a good deal of haggling—and I had to watch Adrian going to pot as he tried to obey the new orders. There was no question now of his taking any days off, and I'm sure it was only for appearances' sake that he managed to squeeze in a few dinners with me. Suddenly, all the ginger was out of him; once more, he looked haggard and drawn.

It was an odd situation. Ordinarily, because we were really on excellent terms, I would have felt free to enquire, to offer assistance—but that, naturally, was out of the question. Uncle Cosmo and I were both helpless; all we could do, unobstrusively, was to make it a little bit easier for him to get hold of some of the rarer specimens.

By the last week of May, he was worse than we'd ever seen him. His efforts to keep up a brave front were very depressing—and to make matters worse Titmouse started writing me notes asking what on earth we had done with him.

Then we heard from the Countess—and the second blow fell. She had done what we'd wanted, but von Krott had started to waken just after the Natives and before the ethnologists, so she'd had no chance to mention the latter part of it. As a consequence, next day he put up a very strong case for sacking the technical people, and then argued even more strongly for solving the problem by espionage. And who was the logical man for the job? Why, the man on the spot: Rittmeister Graf Franz-Christian-Waldemar von und zu Hohenhaupt-Trohna, the man who had cleverly galloped his way into the confidence, not only of his superiors at Webley's, but perhaps even of those shadowy behind-the-scenes military figures who without doubt were masterminding the plot!

Remember, the whole thing had been von Krott's baby, and he must have presented the case with considerable ardour. New orders were shelved, at least temporarily, and Adrian was informed that it was now *his* job to get to the root of the matter, to discover the reason for all the variations.

I was encouraged at first, thinking that things might come back to normal—but Uncle Cosmo soon shattered all such illusions.

"The trouble," he said, "is that Hohenhaupt-Trohna is an intelligent fellow. Up until now, he hasn't had to fret about the solution to the enigma; that's been up to the technical men. Now it's *his* problem—and I'm afraid he's going to see right through to the answer."

"But that means he'll write a report telling them the whole thing's a gull, a hoax! He's too

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honest to do anything else." Then the full import of it came home to me. "In effect he'll be saying that von Krott is an ass and that the Imperial General Staff has been incredibly stupid!"

"Precisely, Gerald—and I'm afraid that von Krott and his friends will reject the report out of hand."

"But he'll be *disgraced*, Uncle Cosmo."

"He will. And they'll tell him so very bluntly before they send him into the next room with a pistol and only one cartridge."

"Sir, we *can't* let that happen!"

My uncle wasn't as fond of Hohenhaupt-Higgins as I was, but he had taken a violent dislike to von Krott; and I suppose that decided him. "By God, we can't!" he growled. "That infernal von Krott shan't have a scapegoat. He'll pay for his own sins. Besides, it's better for us if an Oberst-General is disgraced than a Rittmeister. But what can we do? It's no good asking the Countess. His waking up frightened her, and she's said flatly that she'll make no more nocturnal suggestions."

We looked at each other, each of us thinking as hard as he could. Finally he said, "This is a damned strange situation. The only possible way we can help him, as I see it, is to find a solution ourselves."

"Of course, you young ninny—a solution to his problem. A really good reason for our doing what we've been doing, one he can feed to von Krott. In other words, the spied-upon are going to have to work like the devil to make sure the spy *succeeds* in his spying. It is not, I believe, a situation which occurs very often in history, and would usually be frowned on. Well, how shall we do it?"

I said the first thing that came into my mind. "Why not bring in the Natives? Sir, we could give him the same idea that the Countess was supposed to suggest to von Krott—about all those experts. We might even find some kind of ethnologist. He could talk learnedly about the effect of the wrong kind of rear-sight notch on the discipline of, say, Pathan noncoms."

Uncle Cosmo hoisted his pennant immediately. "We'll try it, by God!" he declared; and we sat there for a good hour thrashing out ways and means.

Hohenhaupt-Higgins's life changed after that. Though he no longer had to add to the Webley Collection, he seemed terribly depressed. Every Sunday, he would visit the farm, and he and Titmouse would go off on long, quiet rides. I often wondered what they said to each other, but I suppose they just talked rather unhappily about horses. I could tell that his sorrows were quite as pro-

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digious as Werther's, though by no means as dramatic, and I would have been much more concerned had Uncle Cosmo not put our plan into action.

Our first Native visitors came in with an army type. They were a risaldar-major from Skinner's Horse, turban, shoulder-chains, and all, and a gloriously garbed, rather overweight pirate who commanded the Palace Guard of some maharajah. They got quite excited over a Fosbery with a swept-back Balkan grip, the risaldar-major booming away in his own language as though he were calling down either curses or blessings upon it.

After that, scarcely a day went by without one or two of them coming in—all sorts of Indians, and Gurkhas, Malays, Afghans, Egyptians, and everything else. The best of them all was the enthologist, a tall, craggy Scot who taught at St. Andrew's, and who proposed the most far-fetched theories so solemnly even I almost came to believe them.

This went on all through June and into July, but Adrian's spirits failed to lift. Instead, his gloom deepened; his rides with Titmouse became longer and slower; she, herself, usually so buoyant, seemed wilted and worn, as though she'd contracted his sadness.

Then all was made clear—I quote from my entry of 8th July, 1914:

"Well, Uncle Cosmo heard from the Countess to-day, and Adrian's done it. He sent his final report in to von Krott a week ago. He stated that there was *no* military motive or plan behind what we were doing; that it had probably started out by being nothing more than the normal muddled way the British did things; that in all probability word of the German interest in it had leaked out; and that our Intelligence had apparently taken advantage of this.

"Lately, obvious attempts had been made—he described them—to attribute significance to the program. He recommended that he be recalled and that the whole operation be cancelled out.

"Von Krott hit the ceiling, and of course the report was rejected. Adrian's been told to get back as quickly as possible, and Uncle Cosmo says that his future looks very bleak. What can we do?"

Of course, there was nothing we *could* do. Even before we learned what had happened, he had seen Mr. Whatman and, pleading the suddenly critical illness of a close relation, had given him a month's notice. Mr. Whatman had sympathised with him, and had informed him that, under the circumstances, he could leave in a fortnight if he wished—they'd manage somehow. For this, Hohenhaupt-Higgins was genuinely grateful.

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We talked it over together, Uncle Cosmo and I and Mr. Whatman and Coulter, and none of us was able to think of anything that would save him. However, Coulter suggested that, considering how hard he'd worked, we just couldn't let him go off without some token of our appreciation and friendship. He also suggested what that token should be, and, when we all agreed with enthusiasm, Mr. Whatman told him to get the men busy.

Well, those last days were strange ones. Hohenhaupt-Higgins now knew that we knew, and we knew that he knew that we knew, but naturally none of us gave any sign of it. Uncle Cosmo kept right on bringing in Natives, each more picturesque than the last, and we kept right on making new variations just as though nothing had changed.

Adrian was very subdued and withdrawn. He stayed much to himself, and did not again go to the farm. Uncle Cosmo and I both wondered how Titmouse would take it when she found out, but we decided that this was a problem better deferred.

Finally, his last day arrived. Mr. Whatman ordered the men to stop work half an hour early, so that there could be a small ceremony in the offices; and Adrian, on the way there, asked me to have dinner with him afterwards.

It was all very moving. Everybody was there, Uncle Cosmo included. Mr. Whatman said a few words, and John Coulter delivered a brief, but quite fervent address dealing with such subjects as True British Craftmanship and Devotion to Duty. Then we gave him the present we had made.

It was a beautiful thing—a *nine*-shot *.32-20* Webley-Fosbery, the only one of its kind in the world, finished in that lovely dark blue you've seen on the WG target revolvers. It had ivory grips, and we'd had it put up in a handsome mahogany case, with all the accessories. The lid had a silver escutcheon on which was engraved: *To Adrian Higgins, With the Esteem and Affection of All at Webley's. 22nd July, 1914.*

We could see he was genuinely touched. He stood there ramrod-straight, holding it in his hands. "Thank you," he said. "You are very kind. Thank you." There were tears in his eyes.

Then the men gave him three rousing cheers, and everyone sang *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*, and there was a great deal of handshaking, and wishing of good wishes, and bidding of good-byes.

Finally, he and I found ourselves out in the street, hailing a cab. We stopped at my quarters so that I could change, then at his so that he could do likewise, and finally we drove to the best restaurant in the city.

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All through dinner—which, by the way, was superb—he was very much his old self. He talked about weapons; he talked about horses and hunting; he talked about Uncle Will and the farm. We drank toast after toast, all very tactfully vague. It was a splendid performance. Then, over the brandy, he became very serious.

"My friend," he began, placing the mahogany-cased Fosbery on the table between us. "I want you to know how much I appreciate this. You've all been almost unbelievably generous." His smile, as he opened the case, was suddenly bitter. "It was decent of you to fill up the cartridge block. I know people who wouldn't have done that. They'd have thought one round was more to the point."

I could make no answer to that. Instead, as casually as I could, I said, "Adrian, old man, have you ever thought about emigrating? Out to New Zealand or—well, some place or other where there's room for a gallop, as Uncle Will puts it."

His manner chilled instantly, but for only an instant. "That was well meant, I know," he replied, "but you are an officer—no officer should ever suggest such a thing. If I were Adrian, I might very well emigrate. As I am Franz-Christian-Waldemar, we cannot discuss it."

Well, now it was out in the open, and besides he was perfectly right.

He asked very quietly, "Gerald, how long have you people known?"

"Several months," I replied, not telling the whole truth.

"One of our technical men informed you?"

I nodded; it would never have done to betray our Countess.

"And now," he said, under his breath, "now everything's over."

I knew what he meant by everything.

He drained his glass. "I'll have to go back, Gerald, but before we part company there are two things I will ask you to do for me." Out of his breast pocket, he took a rather thick envelope. "This letter is for your cousin Alice. Please deliver it into her hands."

I took it, and saw that he had addressed it to Titmouse, only more formally, and I assured him that I'd carry out his instructions.

Then he looked at the unique Fosbery once more, sighed, closed the case, locked it, and gave me the key. "I want you to have this," he said. "I—I do not want it to go with the—the rest of the Webley Collection."

We shook hands. There was really no more to say, and if there had been, I doubt if either of us could have said it.

I picked up the case and went home, leaving him—as I

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thought—to go back to Germany, suffer disgrace, and blow out his brains. I spent a sleepless night worrying about how much I ought to tell Titmouse.

Of course, it didn't work out quite that way. To start with, I took the letter to Titmouse next day, and watched her in silence while she read it and wept. After a bit, I tried to break the news gently. I told her, as tactfully as I could, that Adrian was suspected quite seriously of being a spy.

She flared up instantly. "The whole thing is absurd! There's nothing at Webley's worth spying on."

Although that was true enough, I was a little offended. "Oh?" I remarked. "And what makes you think so?"

"A-A-Adrian told me, you ass! B-besides, I think you're hateful—you and Uncle Cosmo and the whole l-l-lot of you. If England expects every man to do his duty, why shouldn't *Germany?*"

"Titmouse, that's *different,*" I told her. But I decided to pursue the matter no further.

As for Hohenhaupt-Trohna, luck was with him. By the time he got back, August was almost upon us, and the Imperial General Staff was busy with more vital matters. But what I suppose really saved him was that the wretched von Krott, tiptoeing out of his mistress's bedroom full of champagne, caught his spur in the carpet at the head of her staircase and plunged to his doom. Uncle Cosmo learned of it from the Countess, and, even though it ended her usefulness, he celebrated the occasion by buying me dinner. We toasted Adrian any number of times, in the hope that things might work out for him.

In due course, they worked out very nicely. He was given some sort of reprimand, and, restored to life and his regiment, went off to the East to battle Samsonoff. He distinguished himself, naturally, winning the *Pour le Mérite,* and the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, and Lord only knows what else. He was wounded two or three times, and promoted two or three times, and finally was given a staff job on the Austrian front where, wounded again, he was captured by, of all people, the Italians, who treated him splendidly because he had been to their Cavalry School at Tor di Quinto.

After the war, he went back to Germany, but he didn't even stay long enough to watch his estates go down the drain under the Weimar Republic. There were no more Hohenzollerns. Everything was turned topsy-turvy. As soon as he could, he hurried to England, married Titmouse amid general rejoicing, and took her off to New Zealand,

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where they spent their lives raising horses. After one of their beasts won the Grand National two years running, Hohenhaupt-Trohna was actually knighted—and Titmouse referred to him as Sir Adrian to the end of his days.

He seemed to have lost all his interest in weapons, and he never did take back the Fosbery, which, my boy, I am now sending to you as a wedding present. Be happy with it. But take the advice of your grandfather-in-law, and do *not* try to get one of each kind!

Affectionately yours,

Gerald Parringham
Captain, R.N., Retired

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Adleman, Robert	THE BLOODY BENDERS	Stein & Day	$ 5.95	6/3
Erskine, Margaret	THE CASE OF MARY FIELDING	Doubleday	4.50	5/1
Forbes, Stanton	IF LAUREL SHOT HARDY THE WORLD WOULD END	Doubleday	4.50	6/26
Garfield, Brian	THE HIT	Macmillan	4.50	6/8
Lockridge, Richard	TWICE RETIRED	J. B. Lippincott	4.95	6/9
Singer, Loren	THE PARALLAX VIEW	Doubleday	4.95	6/19
Waugh, Hillary	FINISH ME OFF	Doubleday	5.95	6/5

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Eberhart, Mignon G.	THE MAN NEXT DOOR	Popular Library	.60	6/2
Garve, Andrew	THE ASCENT OF D-13	Popular Library	.60	6/2
Garve, Andrew	HIDE AND GO SEEK	Popular Library	.60	6/2
Garve, Andrew	PRISONER'S FRIEND	Popular Library	.60	6/2
Garve, Andrew	A VERY QUIET PLACE	Popular Library	.60	6/2
Shannon, Dell	THE DEATH-BRINGERS	Pyramid	.75	7/15
Stout, Rex	SOME BURIED CAESAR	Pyramid	.75	6/15
Stout, Rex	OVER MY DEAD BODY	Pyramid	.75	7/15
Taylor Phoebe Atwood	OCTAGON HOUSE	Pyramid	.60	7/15

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

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'TEC TITLES:
or, The American Pun Mystery

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

FAMOUS DETECTIVE HEROES AND THEIR EQUALLY FAMOUS CREATORS offer a wealth of fun and games for the died-in-the-wool devotee of murders, riddles, and whodunits; and enterprising publishers of mystery books might deem it witty as well as highly promotional to tie in the author with his or her work. When you consider that *Wolfe Pack* is a most appropriate title for a group of Nero Wolfe stories, it is not surprising that Bantam Books used exactly that title for a box-set of reissued Rex Stout paperbacks. And it has often occurred to us that Ellery Queen might pen further adventures of his hero in a life-and-death novel called *Queen in Danger;* and if the case happened to involve chess (as in EQ's *The Player on the Other Side),* so much the better.

Similarly, the wide field of mystery authors and the names of their protagonists evoke a veritable flood of tie-ins. From the multitalented typewriter of Robert Bloch, for example, why not such titles as *Bloch Party, Blochbusters, Bloch and Cackle,* and *Chips Off the Old Bloch.* Or if G. K. Chesterton's publisher needed an omnibus title, they could easily use *Studies in Brown* to showcase the mental wizardry of Father Brown.

The mind actually boggles at the rich possibilities afforded by some author-title combinations, both for novels and collections of short stories. Namely —

More Specialties of the House (Stanley Ellin)
The Ones That Got Away (Robert L. Fish)
Waugh and Cease (Hillary Waugh) (Wow!)
Carload or *Fell Swoops* (John Dickson Carr)
Hammett and Yeggs (Dashiell Hammett)
Look Over Jordan (Harold Q. Masur)
When the Saint Comes Marching In (Leslie Charteris)
Filets Mignon (Mignon G. Eberhart)
Greene Pastures (Graham Greene)
Archery Practise (Ross Macdonald)
Let Georges Do It (Georges Simenon)

and for a nonfiction study,

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Hist'ries of Christie's Myst'ries (Agatha's, of course)
and recalling an old cigarette commercial,
Call for Philip Marlowe! (Raymond Chandler)

Others in the field provide equally apt *titres justes*—freely translated, the proper titters. To wit:

Poe Pourri (Edgar Allan Poe)
Poirot Pourri (Agatha Christie)
The Case of the Green Thumb (Erle Stanley Gardner)
T As in Trick and Treat (Lawrence Treat)
Standard Brands (Christianna Brand)
Boucher's Vouchers (Anthony Boucher)
Stern Measures (Richard Martin Stern)
Stein Songs (Aaron Marc Stein)
The Biggers the Better (Earl Derr Biggers)
The Real McCloy (Helen McCloy)

Don Bensen, editor of Berkley Books, once suggested in a jovial mood that he would title an Italian edition of the works of Sax Rohmer *Arrivederci. Rohmer.*

Editors also play this amusing game—witness the titles that have been used for some of MWA's thematic anthologies:

Eat, Drink, and Be Buried (deaths by poisons)
Sleuths and Consequences (detectives and solutions)
Crooks' Tour (diverse geographical backgrounds)
Maiden Murders (first short-story appearances of celebrated detectives)

The last two titles were presented to MWA by EQ.

But perhaps one can go too far with this sort of shenanigans. A recent example: a Fairly Popular Practitioner of the black arts of writing mystery novels was cornered at a cocktail party by a Beautiful Lady Fan. The BLF suggested that the FPP's fictional hero become an alcoholic, join Alcoholics Anonymous, and climb back on the wagon by solving a murder in the very environs of AA. This book, the BLF insisted, could have no better title than *Twelve O'Clock High.* Since the FPP's hero is Ed Noon, one can easily see the origin of the pun.

And no title pun on The Master?

For a tag let us quote the memorable one perpetrated by Louis Untermeyer who ended a speech he once gave at a Baker Street Irregulars dinner by suggesting, as the title of a monograph on one of Sherlock Holmes's mysterious interludes, *And So Tibet.*

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 344th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the tale of Harvey Cream, an assistant bank cashier bypassed for promotion in favor of Freddie Shafter, also an assistant cashier but with "more drive, more push"—a tale as smooth, to borrow a leaf from sharp, shrewd Freddie, as Harvey's Bristol Cream . . .

The author, Gary Brandner, was 34 at the time he submitted his first story—"an age," he informed us, "at which I plan to remain for some years." Since having been graduated in journalism from the University of Washington, he has written in diverse fields—technical manuals, television scripts, comedy sketches, and advertising copy. In the summer of 1969 he decided to devote all his writing time to mystery fiction. He likes "cats, blueberry pancakes, and Sherlock Holmes movies" (!); he "would as soon do without harmonicas, diaper commercials, and unisex fashions."

Thank the patron saint of mystery fiction, here is another bright prospect for the genre. . .

A LESSON IN LARCENY

by GARY BRANDNER

FREDDIE SHAFTER WAS THE kind of guy who was always doing unexpected things. Like sneaking up behind me and yelling, "Cheese it, the cops!" Or like slipping a piece of blotter into my sandwich. Still, I was pretty surprised when he asked me to help him rob the bank.

The Civic Bank of Santa Marta, California, that is. Freddie and I both worked there as assistant cashiers. That was the end of any similarity between us. For instance, I had been plodding along at the bank for twelve years to work my way up to asssistant cashier; Freddie had come to

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work there four months ago. I drove a five-year-old Volkswagen; Freddie roared to work in a new yellow XKE. Freddie was gregarious, self-confident popular; I was—well, let's be honest, the office milquetoast. I was also a dandy target for Freddie's style of humor. When we were introduced he said, "Harvey Cream, eh? Didn't you used to work at the mint? Get it? Cream de mint." And believe it or not, everybody laughed.

As far as I could tell, the only interest Freddie had in me was as a foil for his awful puns. So my first surprise came when he asked me to have a drink with him after work. I couldn't think of an excuse not to, so we left my beetle in the parking lot and varoomed off in his Jag to Santa Marta's classiest restaurant. We took an isolated table in the bar section and ordered our drinks: Jack Daniels for Freddie and a Seven-Seven for me.

"Harvey," he said after we had taken a couple of swallows, "how long have you been working at the bank?"

"Twelve years," I told him.

"And you're how old now, thirty-seven? Thirty-eight?"

"I'm thirty-two," I said, a little miffed.

"Okay, you're thirty-two years old and you're what? An assistant cashier just like me, right? And I'm twenty-five."

"Yes, but Mr. MacDougall, the head cashier, is due to retire in three months. I'm pretty sure I'm in line for the job."

Freddie put a brotherly hand on my shoulder. "Harvey, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but there's something you ought to know. I was called in for a talk with L.L. this morning."

L.L.! After twelve years the bank president was never anything but Mr. Burnham to me, even in my private thoughts. "What about?" I choked.

"He told me he'd talked it over with the Board of Directors and they decided they wanted a man as head cashier with more drive, more push, and—well, he offered the job to me." Freddie shrugged helplessly at the injustice of it.

I had to take a couple of gulps from my glass before I could clear my vocal cords. "Congratulations," I gulped.

"Congratulations!" Freddie cried. "Is that all you've got to say? After twelve years of hard work and loyal service to Burnham and his bank they give you a royal brushoff and all you can say is 'congratulations.' Have another drink."

"I guess I *was* kind of counting on that promotion, but they must have decided that you deserve it."

"Nuts! What they decided was that as long as they can keep you working for peanuts, why bother to give you more."

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"What do you think I should do, Freddie, quit?"

"Quit? What good would that do? They'd just find some other drudge to take your place. Besides, at your age you wouldn't find it so easy to get another job."

"I'm only thirty-two."

"That's what I mean. You've got your best years ahead of you. Now's the time to do something about it if you don't want to spend them grinding along as a two-bit assistant cashier."

"Do what, Freddie?"

He leaned toward me and punched the table top with his forefinger. "Help me rob the Civic Bank of Santa Marta."

He sat back to let that sink in. When it finally did I said, "But why you, Freddie? Even if I have reasons, like you say, why would *you* want to rob the bank? You're not even thirty yet, you've got a promotion coming—"

"Promotion, hah! Harvey, you've seen my car. I won't tell you what it cost me, but you can start guessing at five big ones. Take a look at this jacket I'm wearing. You don't buy clothes like this in a Thrift Store. Everything about me is first-class. I like it that way, and I want to keep it that way. Now I'll tell you something else: I'm in debt for all of it and getting in deeper every day. I'm never going to buy my way out as an assistant cashier, and a promotion to head cashier isn't going to do it either. So you've got your reasons and I've got mine. Between us we can pull if off. What do you say?"

For several seconds I couldn't say anything. Finally I blurted, "Freddie, I don't know the first thing about robbing a bank."

"Doesn't make a bit of difference. All you have to do is pay attention to The Old Master, and I'll give you grand larceny in One Easy Lesson. I put a lot of thought into this, and I've got a plan that is simplicity itself, and absolutely safe."

"But I haven't had a gun in my hand since I was in the National Guard. I wouldn't know which end to point."

"A *gun!*" Freddie shook his head pityingly. "What do you think this is, an old George Raft movie? No guns, no nitroglycerin, no risk. Now, if you're interested, I'll tell you exactly how we're going to do it."

All I could do was nod.

"First, there's the vault. It's one of the old double-key types. After you work the combination, which we both know, it takes two different keys to open it. Nobody at the bank carries both keys, but luckily you have one and I have the other. Now, it's well known that you often stay after closing time to work on your books. Nobody would think much about it if you asked for me to

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stay over and help you one night. So we hang around inside the bank until, say, nine o'clock. By that time, as you know, there's nothing stirring in that neighborhood. Then we merely open the vault and stuff the money into a suitcase. I slip out the back door with the loot and stash it in a place where it will be safe. Then I come back and we tie outselves up. We're the victims of a robbery, see."

"I don't think anybody can tie himself up so it looks convincing."

"We don't have to. One of us works loose and calls the police about, oh, say, one a.m. We give them a description of a couple of masked bandits, with guns, who forced their way in, made us open the vault, grabbed the money, tied us up, and beat it. Too bad we didn't get loose sooner, because the crooks could be anywhere by now. Especially with San Francisco International Airport only twenty minutes away."

"Wait a minute, Freddie, I've seen plenty of bank robberies on television, and what usually happens, if the crooks aren't shot down on the spot, is that the police or the F.B.I. or whoever just waits for one of them to start spending a lot of money. When that happens Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. or somebody moves in and puts the arm on them."

"Harvey old friend, don't you think I've considered that? You're absolutely right that it would be too dangerous to begin spending much around here, or anywhere in the country, for that matter. What we do is we wait for the heat to ease off—say, a couple of weeks, or even a month—then we grab the loot and zap to Rio de Janeiro. A lovely city, I hear, plus they won't extradite us."

"But we can't just zap to another country like that. What about passports? Visas?"

Freddie had been waiting for that one. Looking smug, he extracted a business card from his wallet and snapped it down in front of me. "Enough money, as they say, will buy almost anything. You see the name and address on that card? For a price which we will soon be able to afford, that gentleman will fix us up with everything we need to become genuine, legitimate world travelers. New names, new addresses, the whole bit. Whenever we're ready to make our move, day or night, this guy can have us on a jet to Rio in less than an hour. So what do you think?"

What I thought was that his plan was as full of holes as a slice of Swiss cheese. To begin with, employees holding the two different keys for the vault were never allowed in the bank together unless a security guard was present. Also, any bank employee who came to work carrying a suitcase was not likely to go un-

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noticed. From there on I could see maybe a half dozen more reasons why it wouldn't work. But I decided it was worth thinking about.

"You know, Freddie," I said, "it just might work."

He expanded visibly. "Sure it'll work! I figured it all out myself. How about it, are you in?"

"I'll think it over."

"You better think fast, because tomorrow's the day."

"So soon?"

"Look, the longer you wait around, the more chance there is something will go wrong." This was The Old Master talking. "Besides, the circumstances are perfect tomorrow, and we may never get another chance like it. It's the thirty-first of the month when cash deposits are always high, plus tomorrow's the last day of the County Exposition, and all the concessionaires will be depositing their bundles. I figure there'll be a quarter of a million dollars in that vault tomorrow night. Divide that by two, Harvey boy, and tell me if that doesn't set each of us up for a pretty long time."

"Let me sleep on it," I said. "I'll tell you tomorrow morning, if that's all right."

"Okay, laddie, but remember, this may be your last big opportunity. Don't let this one pass you by too." He excused himself and went to the Men's Room just as the waitress came over to collect the bar tab.

The office of L. L. Burnham reflected precisely what Mr. Burnham thought the office of a bank president should look like: dark sturdy furnishings, a grim-faced oil portrait of the original banking Burnham, and a trace of rich cigar smoke in the air. None of that unstable Danish modern furniture, photomurals, and piped-in music for Mr. Burnham. "Looks like a damn motel," he had been heard to say of the San Francisco-based Savings and Loan that had recently opened a branch in Santa Marta.

Mr. Burnham himself, a blocky man with a sweep of iron hair, sat behind his dark sturdy desk and stared at me with his mouth open. "Let me be sure I understand what you're telling me, Cream," he said. "You say that Shafter approached you with a plan to *steal* money from *us*?"

"Yes, sir."

He shook his head like a wounded bull. "You just never know. I guess I'm nothing but a gullible old sentimentalist." He reached for the intercom button. "Might as well get it over with. I'll have Shafter in here and dismiss him immediately."

I spoke up then. "If I may suggest it, Mr. Burnham, by letting him remain free we might be doing a disservice to our com-

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munity, perhaps to our own depositors. If you merely discharge him, in his desperate frame of mind he might get a gun and try an armed robbery somewhere else. Maybe even back here."

"You have a point there, Cream, but I don't see what else I can do. He hasn't actually committed a crime yet. If he were charged with conspiracy it would be only his word against yours."

"Ah, you're absolutely right, Mr. Burnham. But what if I were to play along with him and go through with the robbery? His plan couldn't work without the cooperation of the bank, anyway—calling off the security guard, and so forth. We could have the police waiting outside to catch him red-handed. That way we can be sure he'll go to prison where he belongs."

"Wouldn't that involve some risk for you, Cream?"

"Sir, any risk I may be taking is justified to safeguard the interests of the people of Santa Marta. Especially our depositors."

"By gad, Cream, I like your attitude. When this is over I'll be having a talk with you about that head cashier's position that's opening up soon. I have a feeling the Board is going to look at you with new eyes."

For a moment I thought Mr. Burnham was even going to offer me a cigar, but he recovered himself and went on, "I'll call Chief Dillard, and if he goes along I'll give you the high sign. Meanwhile, you'd better get to your desk before Shafter gets suspicious."

"Yes, sir."

I was able to shuffle papers around on my desk and avoid Freddie's eyes for about fifteen minutes until Mr. Burnham bustled out of his office and over to me in a businesslike manner. He leaned across my desk, pretending to point at something, and said under his breath, "It's all set. There will be a squad of policemen outside the rear door. As soon as Shafter steps out with the money they'll nab him. We'll teach that thief a lesson he won't soon forget." Covertly he gave me the thumb-and-forefinger circle sign and moved away. I flashed the same sign to Freddie, and he answered with a wink.

Everything went according to the scripts then—Freddie's and Mr. Burnham's. I made a show of wanting somebody to stay late and help me find a discrepancy in my accounts, Freddie made a show of volunteering, and Mr. Burnham made a show of giving his approval. Each of us was pleased by the three-cornered charade.

Freddie and I passed the time between closing and nine o'clock by rehearsing the bandit story he had concocted. This included a

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description of the desperadoes who were supposed to have held us up. I thought that, as described by Freddie, the imaginary crooks sort of resembled Henry Fonda and Lon Chaney, Jr.

Zero hour arrived. I took a last peek outside. If the Santa Marta police force was where it was supposed to be, the cops were well hidden. I reported the coast as being clear, and we produced our keys and opened the vault. Freddie's estimate proved to be conservative as we found a bit more than $300,000 in readily spendable currency. We packed it into the suitcase and Freddie hustled it out the back door.

Through the tiny barred window I saw the alley behind the bank suddenly light up like Candlestick Park. An amplified voice blared, "Hold it, Shafter, this is the police. Drop the bag and put your hands over your head."

I held my breath, half expecting a burst of machine-gun fire. Happily, Freddie did as he was told. Chief Dillard came up to the door. "Mr. Cream?"

"Yes."

"We've got him. You can come out now."

Freddie, held between two burly policemen, hands cuffed behind his back, stared at me. "Harvey, you finked on me!"

I shrugged. There didn't seem to be anything to say.

They led Freddie away, and the Chief of Police grabbed my hand and pumped it. "Mr. Cream, you can be proud of what you've done today."

"Any citizen would have done the same thing," I said modestly.

One of the policemen came over carrying the suitcase of money. "What'll we do about this, Chief?" he asked.

I spoke up, "I can put the money back in the vault and lock it up where it will be safe."

"Thanks, Mr. Cream," the Chief said. "I'd appreciate that. I'll leave one of my men here until you're ready to go."

After making sure the vault was secure again, I left the bank by the front door, locking it behind me. The patrolman who had waited out front gave me a friendly wave as I tossed my suitcase into the back of my VW and chugged off.

I was a little uneasy about checking the suitcase at the airport with all the other luggage, but the baggage handlers on international flights are quite conscientious. My way through customs was well greased by the gentleman whose name I had memorized from Freddie's card. If I felt a little sorry for anybody, I guess it was Mr. L. L. Burnham. But then, he was the one who finally learned, as we say here in Rio, a *licão de roubando*—a lesson in larceny.

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METHOD THREE FOR MURDER

by REX STOUT

(continued from page 50)

It was up to me, since it was my case and Wolfe was merely helping, but he had many times asked for my opinion and it wouldn't hurt to reciprocate; so I stepped to the office door and said, "Cramer and Judy Bram. Shall I—"

"Judy!" Mira cried. "She's here?"

I ignored her. "Shall I scoot with Miss Holt and leave them to you?"

He closed his eyes. In three seconds he opened them. "I would say no. But the decision is yours."

"Then we stick. I want to meet Judy anyhow. Sit tight, Miss Holt. Never drop a simple basic lie until it drops you."

As I turned, the bell rang again. I went to the front, put the chain bolt on, opened the door the two inches the chain allowed, and spoke through the crack. "Do you want me, Inspector?"

"I want in. Open up."

"Glad to for you, but not for strangers. Who is the lady?"

"Her name is Judith Bram, she's the owner and driver—"

"I want to see Mira Holt!" the lady said, meaning it. "Open the door!"

I removed the chain, but didn't have to swing the door because she saved me the trouble. She came with it and darted down the hall. Seeing that Cramer, after her, would brush me, I stiffened to make the brush a bump, and he wobbled and lost a step, giving me time to shut the door and reach the office at his heels. When we entered, Judy was sitting on the arm of the red leather chair with her arm across Mira's shoulders, jabbering. Cramer grabbed her arm and barked at her, but she ignored him.

"—and I said yes, the cab might have still been there in front when you left, but I was sure you wouldn't take it, and anyway—"

Cramer yanked her up and around, and as she came she swung with her free hand and smacked him in the face. There was too much of him to be staggered by it, but the sound effect was fine. She jerked loose and glared at him. Her big, brown, well-spaced eyes were ideal for glaring. I had a feeling that I had seen her before, but I hadn't.

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It was just an old memory: a seventh-grade classmate out in Ohio whom I had been impelled to kiss, and she had socked me on the ear with her arithmetic book. She is now married, with five children.

"That's not advisable, Miss Bram," Cramer stated. "Striking a police officer." He moved, got a yellow chair, and swung it around. "Here. Sit down."

"I'll sit where I please." She perched again on the red leather arm. "Is it advisable for a police officer to manhandle a citizen? When I got a hack license I informed myself about laws. Am I under arrest?"

"No."

"Then don't touch me." Her head swung around. "You're Nero Wolfe? You're even bigger." She didn't say bigger than what. "I'm Judy Bram. Are you representing my friend Mira Holt?"

His eyes on her were half closed. " 'Representing' is not the word Miss Bram. I'm a detective, not a lawyer. Miss Holt has hired Mr. Goodwin, and he has hired me as his assistant. You call her your friend. Are you her friend?"

"Yes. And I want to know. She left my place around half-past seven, and about an hour later I went out to keep a date. I had left my cab out front and it wasn't there, but I supposed—"

"Hold it," Cramer snapped. He was on the yellow chair, and I was at my desk. "I'll do the talking—"

She merely raised her voice. "—I supposed a man from the garage had come and got it, I have that arrangement—"

"Shut up!" Cramer roared. "Or I'll shut you up!"

"How?" she asked.

It was a question. He had several choices: clamp his paw on her mouth, or pick her up and carry her out, or call in a couple of big strong men from out front, or hit her with a blunt instrument, or shoot her. All had drawbacks.

"Permit me," Wolfe said. "I suggest, Mr. Cramer, that you have bungled it. The notion of suddenly confronting Miss Holt with Miss Bram was of course tempting, but your appraisal of Miss Bram's temperament was faulty. Now you're stuck. You won't get the contradictions you're after. Miss Holt would be a simpleton to supply particulars until she knows what Miss Bram has said. As you well know, that does not necessarily imply culpability for either of them."

Cramer rasped, "You're telling Miss Holt not to answer any questions."

"Am I? If so, unwittingly. Now, of course, you have made it plain. It would appear that you have only two alternatives: either let Miss Bram finish her account, or remove her."

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"There's a third one I like better. I'll remove Miss Holt." Cramer got up. "Come on, Miss Holt. I'm taking you down for questioning in connection with the murder of Phoebe Arden."

"Is she under arrest?" Judy demanded.

"No. But if she doesn't talk she will be. As a material witness."

"Can he do that, Mr. Wolfe?"

"Yes."

"Without a warrant?"

"In the circumstances, yes."

"Come on, Miss Holt," Cramer growled.

I was sitting with my jaw set. Wolfe would rather miss a meal than let Cramer or any other cop take a client of his from that office into custody, and over the years I had seen and heard him pull some fancy maneuvers to prevent it. But this was my client, and he wasn't batting an eye. I admit that it would have had to be something extra fancy, and it was up to me, not him, but I had split the fee with him.

So I sat with my jaw set while Mira left the chair and Judy jabbered and Cramer touched Mira's arm and they headed for the door. Then I came to, scribbled on my memo pad—formerly my memo pad—tore the sheet off, and made for the hall. Cramer had his hand on the knob.

"Here's the phone number," I told her. "Twenty-four-hour service. Don't forget Method Three."

She took the slip, said, "I won't," and crossed the sill, with Cramer right behind. I noted that the floodlights and the taxi were still there before I shut the door.

Back in the office Wolfe had his eyes closed and Judy Bram was scowling at him. She switched the scowl to me and demanded, "Why don't you put him to bed?"

"Too heavy. How many people did you tell that Mira was going to drive your cab to her husband's house?"

She eyed me, straight, for two breaths, then went to the red leather chair and sat. I took the yellow one, to be closer.

"I thought you were working for her," she said.

"I am."

"You don't sound like it. She didn't drive my cab."

I shook my head. "Come on. Would I be working for her if she hadn't opened up? You told her yesterday that Kearns had phoned you to call for him at eight o'clock today, and she asked you to let her go instead of you. She wanted to have a talk with him about a divorce. How many people did you tell about it?"

"Nobody. If she opened up what's the rest of it?"

"Ask her when you see her. Did you kill Phoebe Arden?"

From the flash in her eye she would have smacked me if I had been close enough. "Oh, for God's

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sake," she said. "Get a club. Drag me by the hair."

"Later maybe." I leaned to her. "Look, Miss Bram. Give your temperament a rest and use your brain. I am working for Mira Holt. I know exactly where she was and what she did, every minute, from seven o'clock this evening on, but I'm not going to tell you. Of course you know that the dead body of a woman named Phoebe Arden was found in your cab. I am certain that Mira didn't kill her, but she is probably going to be charged. I am not certain that the murderer tried to get her tagged for it, but it looks like it. I would be a fathead to tell the murderer about her movements. Wouldn't I? Answer with your brain."

"Yes." She was meeting my eyes.

"Okay. Give me one good reason why I should cross you off. One you would accept if you were in my place. Mira has, naturally, but why should I?"

"Because there's not the slightest—'" She stopped. "No. You don't know that. All right. But don't try twisting my arm. I know some tricks."

"I'll keep my distance if you will. Did you kill Phoebe Arden?"

"No."

"Do you know who did?"

"No."'

"Have you any suspicions? Any ideas?"

"Yes. Or I would have if I knew anything—where and when it happened. Did Phoebe come out to the cab with Waldo Kearns?"

"No. Kearns didn't show up. Mira never saw him."

"But Phoebe came?"

"Not alive. When Mira saw her she was dead. In the cab."

"Then my idea is Waldo. The sophisticated ape. You know you're not any too bright. If I killed her in my own cab while Mira was driving it, I already know everything you do and more. Why not tell me?"

I looked at Wolfe, who had opened his eyes off and on. He grunted. "You told her to use her brain," he muttered.

I returned to Judy. "You certainly would know this: Mira got there before eight o'clock and parked in front. When Kearns hadn't showed at eight thirty she went to the house and spent ten minutes knocking and looking in windows. When she returned to the cab the dead body was in it. She never saw Kearns."

"But my God." Her brows were up. She turned her hands over. "All she had to do was dump it!"

"She hasn't got your temperament. She—"

"She drove *here* with it? To consult *you?*"

"She might have done worse. In fact, she tried to. She phoned

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you, and got no answer. What's your idea about Kearns?"

"He killed Phoebe."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He tried to shake her and she hung on. Or she cheated on him. Or she had a bad cold and he was afraid he would catch it. He put the body in the cab to frame Mira. He hates her because she told him the truth about himself once."

"Did you know Phoebe well? Who and what was she?"

"Well enough. She was a widow at thirty, roaming around. I might have killed her, at that. About a year ago she started scattering remarks about me, and I broke her neck. Almost. She spent a week in a hospital."

"Did it cure her? I mean of remark-scattering?"

"Yes."

"We might as well finish with you. You told Mr. Wolfe that Mira left your place around half-past seven and about an hour later you went out to keep a date. So you might have left at a quarter after eight."

"I might, but I didn't. I walked to Mitchell Hall on Fourteenth Street to make a speech at a cab drivers' meeting, and I got there at five minutes to nine. After the meeting I walked back home, and two cops were there waiting for me. They were dumb enough to ask me first where my cab was, and I said I supposed it was in the garage. When they said no, it was parked on Thirty-fifth Street, and asked me to come and identify it, naturally I went. I also identified a dead body, which they hadn't mentioned. Is that Inspector Cramer dumb?"

"No."

"I thought not. When he asked me if I knew Mira Holt, of course I said yes, and when he asked when I last saw her I told him. Since I had no idea what had happened I thought that was safest, but I said I hadn't told her she could take the cab and I knew she wouldn't take it without asking me. Does that finish with me?"

"It's a good start. How well do you know Gilbert Irving?"

That fazed her. Her mouth opened and she gawked with her big, brown, well-spaced eyes. "Are my ears working?" she demanded. "Did you say Gilbert Irving?"

"That's right."

"Who let him in?"

"Mira mentioned him. How well do you know him?"

"Too well. I dream about a lion standing on a rock about to spring at me, and I suspect it's him. If my subconscious is yearning for him it had better go soak its head, because first he's married and his wife has claws, and second, when he looks at Mira or hears her voice he has to lean against something to keep from

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trembling. Did she tell you that?"

"No. Who is he? What does he do?"

"Something in Wall Street, but he doesn't look it. Why did Mira mention him?"

"Because I made her. She phoned him last evening and told him she was going to drive your cab and why. She wanted to know what he thought of it. I want to know what motive he might have for killing Phoebe Arden."

She opened her mouth to reply, then decided to laugh instead. It was a real laugh, no giggle.

I raised a brow. "Your subconscious taking over?"

"No." She sobered. "I couldn't help it. It struck me, of course Gil killed her. He couldn't bear the thought of Mira's husband being unfaithful to her, it was an insult to her womanhood, so he killed Phoebe. Do you blame me for laughing?"

"No. I'll laugh too when I get around to it. Does anything else strike you? A motive for him you wouldn't laugh at?"

"Of course not. It's ridiculous. You're just floundering around. Have you finished with me?"

I looked at Wolfe. His eyes were closed. "For now, yes," I told her, "unless Mr. Wolfe thinks I skipped something."

"How can he? You can talk in your sleep, but you can't think." She stood up. "What are you going to do?"

"Find a murderer and stick pins in him. Or her."

"Not sitting here you aren't. Don't bother, I know the way out. Why don't you go and tackle Wally Kearns? I'll go with you."

"Thanks, I'll manage."

"Where did he take Mira?"

"Either to Homicide West, two thirty West Twentieth, or to the District Attorney's office, one fifty-five Leonard. Try Twentieth Street first."

"I will." She turned and was off. I followed, to let her out, but she was a fast walker and I would have had to trot to catch up. When I reached the door she had it open. I stepped out to the stoop and watched her descend to the sidewalk and turn west. The floodlights and ropes and police cars were gone, and so was Judy's cab. My wrist watch said five minutes past midnight as I went in and shut the door. I returned to the office and found Wolfe on his feet with his eyes open.

"I assumed," I said, "that if you wanted something from her I hadn't got, you would say so."

"Naturally."

"Have you any comments?"

"No. It's bedtime."

"Yeah. Since you're with me on this, which I appreciate, perhaps I'd better sleep here. If you don't mind."

"Certainly. You own your bed. I have a suggestion. I presume

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you intend to have a look at that place in the morning, and to see Mr. Kearns. It might be well for me to see him too."

"I agree. Thank you for suggesting it. If they haven't got him downtown I'll have him here at eleven o'clock." I made it eleven because that was his earliest hour for an appointment, when he came down from his two-hour session up in the plant rooms with the orchids.

"Make it a quarter past eleven," he said. "I will be engaged until then with Mr. Anderson."

I opened my mouth and closed it again. "Didn't you phone him not to come?"

"On the contrary, I phoned him to come. On reflection I saw that I had been hasty. In my employ, as my agent, you had made a commitment, and I was bound by it. I should not have repudiated it. I should have honored it, and then dismissed you if I considered your disregard of the rules intolerable."

"I see. I can understand that you'd rather fire me than have me quit."

"I said 'if.'"

I lifted my shoulders and dropped them. "It's a little complicated. If I have quit you can't fire me. If I haven't quit I am still on your payroll, and it would be unethical for me to have Miss Holt as my client. It would also be wrong for you to accept pay from me for helping me with the kind of work you are paying me to do. If you return the twenty-five to me and I return the fifty to Miss Holt, I will be deserting an innocent fellow being in a jam whom I have accepted as a client, and that would be inexcusable. It looks to me as if we have got ourselves in a fix that is absolutely hopeless, and I can't see—"

"Confound it," he roared, "go to bed!" and marched out.

By 8:15 Tuesday morning I was pretty well convinced that Mira Holt was in the coop, since I had got it from three different sources. At 7:20 Judy Bram had phoned to say that Mira was under arrest and what was I going to do. I said it wouldn't be practical to tell a suspect my plans, and she hung up on me. At 7:40 Lon Cohen of the *Gazette* phoned to ask if it was true that I had quit my job with Nero Wolfe, and if so what was I doing there, and was Mira Holt my client, and if so what was she doing in the can, and had she killed Phoebe Arden or not. Since Lon had often been useful and might be again, I explained fully, off the record, why I couldn't explain. And at eight o'clock the radio said that Mira Holt was being held as a material witness in the murder of Phoebe Arden.

Neither Lon nor the radio sup-

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plied any items that helped, nor did the morning papers. The *Star* had a picture of the taxi parked in front of Wolfe's house, but I had seen that for myself. It also had a description of the clothes Phoebe Arden had died in, but what I needed was a description of the clothes the murderer had killed in. And it gave the specifications of the knife—an ordinary kitchen knife with a five-inch blade and a plastic handle—but if the answer was going to come from any routine operation like tracing the knife or lifting prints from the handle, it would be Cramer's army who would get it, not me.

I made one phone call, to Anderson, to ask him to postpone his appointment because Wolfe was busy on a case, and he said sure, it wasn't urgent; and, since Fritz takes Wolfe's breakfast to his room and I seldom see him before he comes down to the office at eleven, I put a note on his desk. I wanted to make another call, to Nathaniel Parker, the lawyer, but vetoed it. For getting Mira out on bail he would have charged about ten times what she had paid me, and there was no big hurry. It would teach her not to drive a hack without a license.

At a quarter past eight I left the house and went to Ninth Avenue for a taxi, and at half-past I dismissed it at the corner of Carmine and Ferrell, and walked down Ferrell Street to its dead end. There were only two alternatives for what had happened during the period—call it ten minutes—when Mira had been away from the cab: either the murderer, having already killed Phoebe Arden, had carried or dragged the body to the cab and hoisted it in, or he had got in the cab with her and killed her there. I preferred the latter, since you can walk to a cab with a live woman in much less time than you can carry her to it dead, and also since, even in a secluded spot like that and even after dark, there is much less risk of being noticed. But in either case they had to come from some place nearby.

The first place to consider was Kearns's house, but it only took five minutes to cross it off. The alley that led to it was walled on both sides, Mira had been parked at its mouth, and there was no other way to get from the house to the street. On the left of the alley was a walled-in lumber yard, and on the right was a dingy old two-story warehouse. On inspection neither of them seemed an ideal spot for cover, but across the street was a beaut. It was an open lot cluttered with blocks of stone scattered and piled around, some rough and some chiseled and polished. A whole company could

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have hid there, let alone one murderer and one victim.

As you know, I was already on record that Mira hadn't killed her, but it was nice to see that stoneyard. If there had been no place to hide in easy distance . . . Three men were there, two discussing a stone and one chiseling, but they wouldn't be there at eight in the evening. I recrossed the street, entered the alley, and walked through.

By gum, Kearns had a garden, a sizable patch, say forty by sixty, with flowers in bloom and a little pool with a fountain, and a flagstone path leading to the door of a two-story brick house painted white. I hadn't known there was anything like it in Manhattan, and I thought I knew Manhattan. A man in a gray shirt and blue jeans was kneeling among the flowers, and halfway up the path I stopped and asked him, "Are you Waldo Kearns?"

"Do I look it?" he demanded.

"Yes and no. Are you Morton?"

"That's my name. What's yours?"

"Goodwin." I headed for the house, but he called, "Nobody there," and I turned.

"Where's Mr. Kearns?"

"I don't know. He went out a while ago."

"When will he be back?"

"I couldn't say."

I looked disappointed. "I should have phoned. I want to buy a picture. I came last evening around half-past eight and knocked, but nothing doing. I knocked loud because I heard the radio or TV going."

"It was the TV. I was watching it. I heard you knock. I don't open the door at night when he's not here. There's some tough ones around this neighborhood."

"I don't blame you. I suppose I just missed him. What time did he leave last evening?"

"What difference does it make when he left if he wasn't here?"

Perfectly logical, not only for him but for me. If Kearns hadn't been there when Mira arrived in the cab it didn't matter when he had left. I would have liked to ask Morton one more question, whether anyone had left with him, but from the look in his eye he would have used some more logic on me; so I skipped it, said I'd try again, and went.

There was no use hanging around because if Kearns had gone to call at the District Attorney's office by request, which was highly probable, there was no telling when he would be back. I had got Gilbert Irving's business address from the phone book, on Wall Street, but there was no use going there at that early hour. However, I had also got his home address, on East 78th Street, and I might catch him before he left, so I hoofed it along Ferrell Street

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back to civilization and flagged a taxi.

It was 9:15 when I climbed out in front of the number on 78th Street, a tenement palace with a marquee and a doorman. In the lobby another uniformed sentry sprang into action, and I told him, "Mr. Gilbert Irving. Tell him a friend of Miss Holt." He went and used a phone, returned and said, "Fourteen B," and watched me like a hawk as I walked to the elevator and entered. When I got out at the fourteenth floor the elevator man stood and watched until I had pushed the button and the door had opened and I had been invited in.

The inviter was no maid or butler. She might have passed for a maid in uniform, but not in the long, flowing, patterned-silk number which she probably called a breakfast gown. Without any suggestions about my hat she said, "This way, please," and led me across the hall, through an arch into a room half as big as Kearns's garden, and over to chairs near a corner. She sat on one of them and indicated another for me.

I stood. "Perhaps the man downstairs didn't understand me," I suggested. "I asked for Mr. Irving."

"I know," she said. "He isn't here. I am his wife. We are friends of Miss Holt, and we're disturbed about the terrible—about her difficulty. You're a friend of hers?"

Her voice was a surprise because it didn't fit. She was slender and not very tall, with a round little face and a little curved mouth, but her deep strong voice was what you would expect from a female sergeant. Nothing about her suggested the claws that Judy Bram had mentioned, but they could have been drawn in.

"A new friend," I said. "I've known her twelve hours. If you've read the morning paper you may have noted that she was sitting on the stoop of Nero Wolfe's house with a man named Archie Goodwin when a cop found the body in the taxi. I'm Goodwin, and she has hired me to find out things."

She adjusted the gown to cover a leg better. "According to the radio she has hired Nero Wolfe. She was arrested in his house."

"That's a technical point. We're both working on it. I'm seeing people who might have some information, and Mr. Irving is on my list. Is he at his office?"

"I suppose so. He left earlier than usual." The leg was safe, no exposure above the ankle, but she adjusted the gown again. "What kind of information? Perhaps I could help?"

I couldn't very well ask if her husband had told her that Mira had told him she was going to drive Judy's cab. But she wanted

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to help. I sat down. "Almost anything might be useful, Mrs. Irving. Were you and your husband also friends of Phoebe Arden?"

"I was. My husband knew her, of course, but you couldn't say they were friends."

"Were they enemies?"

"Oh, no. It was just that they didn't hit it off."

"When did you see her last?"

"Four days ago, last Friday, at a cocktail party at Waldo Kearns's house. I was thinking about it when you came. She was so gay. She was a gay person."

"You hadn't seen her since?"

"No." She was going to add something, but checked it.

It was so obvious that I asked, "But you had heard from her? A letter or a phone call?"

"How did you know that?" she demanded.

"I didn't. Most detective work is guessing. Was it a letter?"

"No." She hesitated. "I would like to help, Mr. Goodwin, but I doubt if it's important, and I c e r t a i n l y don't want any notoriety."

"Of course not, Mrs. Irving." I was sympathetic. "If you mean, if you tell me something will I tell the police, absolutely not. They have arrested my client."

"Well." She crossed her legs, glancing down to see that nothing was revealed. "I phoned Phoebe yesterday afternoon. My husband and I had tickets for the theater last evening, but about three o'clock he phoned me that a business associate from the West Coast had arrived unexpectedly, and he had to take him to dinner. So I phoned Phoebe and we arranged to meet at Morsini's at a quarter to seven for dinner and then go to the theater. I was there on time, but she didn't come.

"At a quarter past seven I called her number, but there was no answer. I don't like to eat alone at a place like Morsini's, so I waited a little longer and then left word for her and went to Schrafft's. She didn't come. I thought she might come to the theater, the Majestic, and I waited in the lobby until after nine, then I left a ticket for her at the box office and went in. I would tell the police about it if I thought it was important, but it doesn't really *tell* anything except that she was at home when I phoned around three o'clock. Does it?"

"Sure it does. Did she agree definitely to meet you at Morsini's or was it tentative?"

"It was quite definite."

"Then it was c e r t a i n l y something that happened after three o'clock that kept her from meeting you. It was probably something that happened after six thirty or she would have phoned you—if she was still alive. Have you any idea at all what it might have been?"

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"None whatever. I can't guess."

"Have you any ideas about who might have killed her?"

"No. I can't guess that either."

"Do you think Mira Holt killed her?"

"Good heavens, no. Not Mira. Even if she had—"

"Even if she had what?"

"Nothing. Mira wouldn't kill anybody. They don't think that, do they?"

Over the years at least a thousand people have asked me what the police think, and I appreciate the compliment though I rarely deserve it. Life would be much simpler if I always knew what the police think at any given moment. It's hard enough to know what I think. After another ten minutes with her I decided that I thought that Mrs. Irving had nothing more to contribute, so I thanked her and departed. She came with me to the hall, and even picked up my hat from the chair where I had dropped it. I had yet to get a glimpse of her legs.

It was ten minutes to ten when I emerged to the sidewalk and turned left for Lexington Avenue and the subway, and a quarter past when I entered the marble lobby of a towering beehive on Wall Street and consulted the building directory. Gilbert Irving's firm had the whole thirtieth floor, and I found the proper bank of elevators, entered one, and was hoisted straight up three hundred feet for nothing. In a paneled chamber with a thick conservative carpet a handsome conservative creature at a desk bigger than Wolfe's told me in a voice like silk that Mr. Irving was not in and that she knew not when he would arrive or where he was. If I cared to wait?

I didn't. I left, got myself dropped back down the three hundred feet, and went to another subway, this time the west side; and, leaving at Christopher, walked to Ferrell Street and on to its dead end and through the alley. Morton, still at work in the garden, greeted me with reserve but not coldly, said Kearns had not returned and there had been no word from him, and, as I was turning to go, suddenly stood up and asked, "Did you say you wanted to *buy* a picture?"

I said that was my idea but naturally I wanted to see it first, left him wagging his head, walked the length of Ferrell Street the fourth time that day, found a taxi, and gave the driver the address which might or might not still be mine. As we turned into 35th Street from Eighth Avenue, at five minutes past eleven, there was another taxi just ahead of us, and it stopped at the curb in front of the brownstone.

I handed my driver a bill, hopped out, and had mounted the stoop by the time the man from

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the other cab had crossed the sidewalk. I had never seen him or a picture of him, or heard him described, but I knew him. I don't know whether it was his floppy black hat or shoestring tie, neat little ears or face like a squirrel, but I knew him. I had the door open when he reached the stoop.

"I would like to see Mr. Nero Wolfe," he said. "I'm Waldo Kearns."

Since Wolfe had suggested that I should bring Kearns there so we could look at him together, I would just as soon have let him think I had filled the order, but of course that wouldn't do. So when, having taken the floppy black hat and put it on the shelf in the hall, I escorted him to the office and pronounced his name, I added, "I met Mr. Kearns out front. He arrived just as I did."

Wolfe, behind his desk, had been pouring beer when we entered. He put the bottle down. "Then you haven't talked with him?"

"No, sir."

He turned to Kearns, in the red leather chair. "Will you have beer, sir?"

"Heavens, no." Kearns was emphatic. "I didn't come for amenities. My business is urgent. I am extremely displeased with the counsel you have given my wife. You must have hypnotized her. She refuses to see me. She refuses to accept the services of my lawyer, even to arrange bail for her. I demand an explanation. I intend to hold you to account for alienating the affection of my wife."

"Affections," Wolfe said.

"What?"

"Affections. In that context the plural is used." He lifted the glass and drank, and licked his lips.

Kearns stared at him. "I didn't come here," he said, "to have my grammar corrected."

"Not grammar. Diction."

Kearns pounded the chair arm. "What have you to say?"

"It would be futile for me to say anything whatever until you have regained your senses, if you have any. If you think your wife had affection for you until she met me twelve hours ago, you're an ass. If you know she hadn't, your threat is fatuous. In either case what can you expect but contempt?"

"I expect an explanation! I expect the truth! I expect you to tell me why my wife refuses to see me!"

"I can't tell you what I don't know. I don't even know that she has, since in your present state I question the accuracy of your reporting. When and where did she refuse?"

"This morning. Just now, in the District Attorney's office. She won't even talk to my lawyer.

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She told him she was waiting to hear from you and Goodwin." His head jerked to me. "You're Goodwin?"

I admitted it. His head jerked back. "It's humiliating! It's degrading! My wife under arrest! Mrs. Waldo Kearns in jail! Dishonor to my name and to me! And you're to blame!"

Wolfe took a breath. "I doubt if it's worth the trouble," he said, "but I'm willing to try. I presume what you're after is an account of our conversation with your wife last evening. I might consider supplying it, but first I would have to be satisfied of your *bona fides*. Will you answer some questions?"

"It depends on what they are."

"Probably you have already answered them, to the police. Has your wife wanted a divorce and have you refused to consent?"

"Yes. I regard the marriage contract as a sacred convenant."

"Have you refused to discuss it with her in recent months?"

"The police didn't ask that."

"I ask it. I need to establish not only your *bona fides*, Mr. Kearns, but also your wife's. It shouldn't embarrass you to answer that."

"It doesn't embarrass me. You can't embarrass me. It would have been useless to discuss it with her since I wouldn't consider it."

"So you wouldn't see her?"

"Naturally. That was all she would talk about."

"Have you been contributing to her support since she left you?"

"She didn't leave me. We agreed to try living separately. She wouldn't let me contribute to her support. I offered to. I wanted to."

"The police certainly asked you if you killed Phoebe Arden. Did you?"

"No. Why in God's name would I kill her?"

"I don't know. Miss Judith Bram suggested that she may have had a bad cold and you were afraid you would catch it, but that seems far-fetched. By the way—"

"Judy? Judy Bram said that? I don't believe it!"

"But she did. In this room last evening, in the chair you now occupy. She also called you a sophisticated ape."

"You're lying!"

"No. I'm not above lying, or below it, but the truth will do now. Also—"

"You're lying. You've never seen Judy Bram. You're merely repeating something my wife said."

"That's interesting, Mr. Kearns, and even suggestive. You are willing to believe that your wife called you a sophisticated ape, but not that Miss Bram did. When I do lie I try not to be clumsy. Miss Bram was here last evening, with Mr. Goodwin and me, for half an hour or more; and that

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brings me to a ticklish point. I must ask you about a detail that the police don't know about. Certainly they asked about your movements last evening, but they didn't know that you had arranged with Judith Bram to call for you in her cab at eight o'clock. Unless you told them?"

Kearns sat still, and for him it is worth mentioning. With many people sitting still is nothing remarkable, but with him it was. His sitting, like his face, reminded me of a squirrel; he kept moving or twitching something—a hand, a shoulder, a foot, even his head. Now he was motionless all over.

"Say that again," he commanded.

Wolfe obeyed. "Have you told the police that you had arranged with Miss Bram to call for you in her cab at eight o'clock last evening?"

"No. Why should I tell them something that isn't true?"

"You shouldn't, ideally, but people often do. I do occasionally. However, that's i r r e l e v a n t. Evidently Miss Bram hasn't told the police, but she told me. I mention it to insure that you'll tell *me* the truth when you recount your movements last evening."

"If she told you that she lied."

"Oh, come, Mr. K e a r n s." Wolfe was disgusted. "It i s established that her cab stood at the mouth of the alley leading to your house for more than half an hour, having come at your bidding. If you omitted that detail in your statement to the police I may have to supply it. Haven't you spoken with Miss Bram since?"

"No." He was still motionless. "Her phone doesn't answer. She's not at home. I went there." He passed his tongue across his lower lip. I admit I have never seen a squirrel do that. "I couldn't tell the police her cab was there last evening because I didn't know it was. I wasn't there."

"Where were you? Consider that I know you had ordered the cab for eight o'clock and hadn't canceled the order."

"I've told the police where I was."

"Then your memory has been jogged."

"It didn't need jogging. I was at the studio of a man named Prosch. I went there to meet Miss Arden and look at a picture she was going to buy. I got there at a quarter to eight and left at nine o'clock. She hadn't come, and—"

"If you please. Miss Phoebe Arden?"

"Yes. She phoned me at half-past seven and said she had about decided to buy a painting, a still life, from Prosch, and was going to his studio to look at it again, and asked me to meet her there to help her decide. I was a little surprised because she knows what

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I think of daubers like Prosch, but I said I would go. His studio is on Carmine Street, in walking distance from my house, and I walked. She hadn't arrived, and I had only been there two or three minutes when she phoned and asked to speak to me. She said she had been delayed and would get there as soon as she could, and asked me to wait for her. My thought was that I would wait until midnight rather than have her buy a still life by Prosch, but I didn't say so. I didn't wait until midnight, but I waited until nine o'clock. I discussed painting with Prosch a while, until he became insufferable, and then went down to the street and waited there. She never came. I walked back home."

Wolfe grunted. "Can there be any doubt that it was Miss Arden on the phone? Both times?"

"Not the slightest. I couldn't possibly mistake her voice."

"What time was it when you left Mr. Prosch and went down to the street?"

"About half-past eight. I told the police I couldn't be exact about that, but I could about when I started home. It was exactly nine o'clock." Kearns's hands moved. Back to normal. "Now I'll hear what you have to say."

"In a moment. Miss Bram was to come at eight o'clock. Why didn't you phone her?"

"Because I thought I would be back. Probably a little late, but she would wait. I didn't phone her after Miss Arden phoned that she was delayed because she would be gone."

"Where was she to drive you?"

"To Long Island. A party. What does that matter?" He was himself again. "You talk now, and I want the truth!"

Wolfe picked up his glass, emptied it, and put it down. "Possibly you are entitled to it, Mr. Kearns. Unquestionably a man of your standing would feel keenly the ignominy of having a wife in jail—the woman to whom you have given your name, though she doesn't use it. You may know that she came to this house at twenty minutes past nine last evening."

"I know nothing. I told you she won't see me."

"So you did. She arrived just as Mr. Goodwin was leaving the house on an errand and they met on the stoop. No doubt you know that Mr. Goodwin is permanently in my employ as my confidential assistant—permanently, that is, in the sense that neither of us has any present intention of ending it or changing its terms."

Kearns was fidgeting again. I was not. He spoke. "The paper said he had left your employ. It didn't say on account of my wife, but of course it was."

"Bosh." Wolfe's head turned.

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Do you agree?" Archie?

"Bosh," I agreed. "The idea of quitting on account of Miss Holt never entered my head."

Kearns hit the chair arm. "Mrs. Kearns!"

"Okay," I conceded. "Mrs. Waldo Kearns."

"So," Wolfe said, "your wife's first contact was with Mr. Goodwin. They sat on the stoop and talked. You know, of course, that Miss Bram's cab was there at the curb with Miss Arden's body in it."

"Yes. What did my wife say?"

"I'll come to that. Police came along in a car and discovered the body, reported it, and soon there was an army. A policeman named Cramer talked with Mr. Goodwin and your wife, I went to the door and invited them to enter—not Mr. Cramer—and they did so. We talked for half an hour or so, when Mr. Cramer came with Miss Bram, and they were admitted. Mr. Cramer, annoyed by the loquacity of Miss Bram, and wishing to speak with your wife privately, took her away. You demanded the truth, sir, and you have it. I add one item, also true: since your wife had engaged Mr. Goodwin's services, and through him mine also, what she told us was confidential and can't be divulged. Now for—"

Kearns bounced out of the chair, and as he did so the doorbell rang. Since a man who might have stuck a knife in a woman might be capable of other forms of violence, I was going to leave the door to Fritz, but Wolfe shot me a glance and I went to the hall for a look. On the stoop was a tall guy with a bony face and a strong jaw. Behind me Kearns was yapping but had drawn no weapon. I went to the front and opened the door.

"To see Mr. Wolfe," he said. "My name is Gilbert Irving."

The temptation was too strong. Only twelve hours ago I had seen a confrontation backfire for Cramer, when he had brought Judy Bram in to face Mira; but this time the temperament was already in the office, having a fit, and it would be interesting to see the reaction, and possibly helpful. So I told him to come in, took his Homburg and put it on the shelf beside the floppy black number, and steered him to the office.

Kearns was still on his feet yapping, but when Wolfe's eyes left him to direct a scowl at me he turned his head. I ignored the scowl. I had disregarded another rule by bringing in a visitor without consulting Wolfe, but as far as I was concerned Mira was still my client and it was my case. I merely pronounced names. "Mr. Gilbert Irving. Mr. Wolfe."

The reaction was interesting enough, though not helpful, since it was no news that Kearns and

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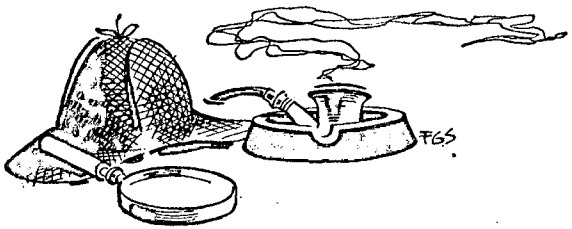
Irving were not pals. Perhaps Kearns didn't actually spit at him because it could have been merely that moisture came out with his snort. Two insulting words followed immediately.

Irving must have had lessons or practise, or both. His uppercut, with his right, was swift and sure, and had power. It caught Kearns right on the button and sent him straight up a good six inches before he swayed against the corner of Wolfe's desk.

(*continued on page 126*)



CRIMINALIMERICK

STOUT FELLOW II

by D. R. BENSEN

When somebody murders or steals,
Nero Wolfe, it is obvious, feels
That the whole wretched case
Has to take second place
To his schedule for orchids and meals.

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Winner of a* SECOND PRIZE *in

the* CWA *contest

PIERRE AUDEMARS

An unusual locale-and-time for a tale of murder and revenge: England about the middle of the Seventh Century, when the Vikings were making sporadic raids to plunder and slay and burn. In "Lunden" the Saxon king could be the Ambrosius, the legendary King Arthur, mentioned in the Annales Cambriae, and the early Britons could be Roman soldiers to whom grants of land had been given and who had remained in England as settlers . . . a "different" type, in the broad sense, of the mystery story. . .

THE RING AND THE SQUARE

by PIERRE AUDEMARS

THE MAN LEANED, DEADLY tired, against the saddle of the high black horse and stared out over the rapidly darkening sea. The square sail of the longship was now nothing more than an indistinguishable blur. He had watched it for a long time. His chain mail was dull and sticky with blood, yet he still held his head proudly and his eyes strained to pierce the twilight with the intensity of an eagle.

He heard the crunching of oxhide soles on the shingle of the foreshore but he did not turn or move his head.

"Lord, the tally is done."

Then he turned, bracing himself as if for a blow.

"How many?"

Rough homespun and leather, torn and slit and bloodied in the fight, and the hideously stained head of an axe sticking up over his shoulder; eyes deep-set, calm and wise and a hard leather-hued face framed in a square black beard: this was Cedric the thegn.

"Seven and twenty, lord."

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"They died like men. They broke the shield ring."

"Yeah, lord."

"Gorlias the hedger, Ulf the swineherd, Ethelred the thatcher—they broke the shield ring of the Vikings. They showed how free men can fight and how free men can die. Where are they now, Cedric?"

"They are laid out where they fell, lord."

"Take them to the churchyard, Cedric."

"Now, lord? The wounded—"

"Now, Cedric. The wounded live. These souls await a priest's shriving to lie with the sweet Jesus."

"Yeah, lord."

The thegn looked out over the darkening sea.

"Have they gone?"

"They take his body home. It is the custom. But they will return."

Into the fjord the longship glided, as smoothly as if floating on a carpet of silk, the square sail set to catch the slight breeze, the helmsman bending his weight on the long oar as he skilfully steered the ship between the sharp and jagged rocks.

The massive cliffs loomed high in the ghostly grey light of the early morning; the sea slept calm, like a mirror of burnished glass, whose surface sometimes seemed to shiver as the breeze stole across in a fugitive gust. Ghost-like the beautiful dark longship stole into the harbour out of the night, the bright scarlet of its sail grey and the warriors' polished shields misted.

Then the silence was broken. The still air awoke and vibrated and re-echoed as the sea-birds swooped from their inaccessible nests with hoarse and plaintive and almost human cries.

The great Jarl had come home—home from his sailing, home from the sea. Home from the foray, up the steep and winding cliff path, into the great and lofty hall with its smoke-blackened beams; home for the last time, stiff and straight on his war shield, with his beringed hands folded on his breastplate and the hilt of his long golden sword before his bleak dead eyes.

Long after he was alone the man stayed motionless, leaning to gather strength on the patient back of his horse, staring out across the narrow harbour at the dark and silent sea.

There was work to be done, but the tumult of his thoughts held him as if chained to the curling and breaking waves.

The Vikings had been beaten off, but they would come again. And again after that. There were no defences to stop them. He could set a boom across the harbour, a boom of tree-trunks

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anchored with iron spikes that would defy the strongest axe, like the one the Romans had once laid at Ostia. But they did not even have to use the harbour. The longship was flat-bottomed; they could beach it on the shingle of the foreshore. What could he do against such an enemy?

Double the watchers in the church-tower and train and re-train the men, as he had done before, so that each one knew his appointed place and part like the palm of his own hand. With seven and twenty dead, that would no longer be easy. Perhaps he could raise men from some of the inland hamlets, each to stay for a number of days until his replacement arrived. But for that he would have to pay. He still had some of the jewels he had dug up from undar the charred garden in the west. No man would leave the tending of his strip without money. One hamlet had no concern with the affairs of another, however near.

They would have to be taught that what concerned one touched all. This had been proved in the land of the Iceni.

The sky and the sea were dark now, the foam of the surf a milk-white and spreading hand. The crash and the thunder of the waves were ceaseless and eternal, and somehow strangely comforting. All this would abide, long after he had gone.

The Jarl's daughter Hilde took little part in the feasting.

The warriors shouted and boasted and grew quarrelsome as the ale circulated freely, as they banged their horns on the board and dashed the foam from their beards. Voices grew high and eager as the skald intoned the dead Jarl's mighty deed that the gods, in Valhalla's great hall, already knew.

But Hilde sat apart, beside the empty chair, her hands clasping her jewelled girdle. Presently she beckoned to a man sitting nearby at the board, that he come to sit by her.

"Eric, what is the true telling of it?"

Eric had been the Jarl's captain, a great fair man with blue eyes, whose word carried weight at the Thing. He had sat apart from the others, and although his horn was more often empty than full, he had only grown more silent.

Now he roused himself as if from a dream, and as he took the new seat he touched the bloody silk about his arm.

"It is a tale short in the telling, lady," he replied, emptying his horn with one gigantic swallow. "From the fjord in the spring we followed the line of the coast to the south, past Friesland, and then still further south until we came to that fair land where lies the mouth of the great river. We

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followed its winding past many hamlets and one town, where we plundered and took much gear. In the end we came in sight of the great city on the island, which they are building anew after the fire, but it is guarded now by fortified bridges, too strong for any attempt by one ship.

"We turned back to the coast. Then we put about and with a following wind we crossed the narrow sea. There was a village beside a harbour, where the soft green land seems to swell up into the sky.

"The Jarl was for one more foray, the last. I said nay, for already we had done well. The ship was deep to the oar-locks. But he would not be gainsaid."

"And then—"

Eric looked over her golden head. His voice grew hard. "And then we beached and made a landing. The shingle is flat at low tide with a gentle slope at high. The place seemed deserted. But it was a trap. Suddenly they were on us—like a storm. We made the shield ring."

The hard voice grew bitter. He summoned a thrall with a leather bottle and once his horn was filled he took a deep draught.

"And they broke it. They broke the shield ring of Hfalgersfjord. There was a warrior on a black horse—the only man mounted—and he challenged the Jarl—"

"On horseback?"

"Nay, lady. He dismounted. And yet it was his right to stay horsed."

The quiet sincerity in Eric's voice shamed her contempt.

"By Odin and by Thor—there was a combat! His sword was a toy—not half the length of the Jarl's."

Hilde's eyes filled with tears. "My father was the mightiest warrior in the Northland—in fair fight."

"Aye, lady. So thought we. But this day he met a mightier. This too was fair fight. We made the ring again and reached the ship—those of us who were yet alive."

But Hilde shook her head. "I do not believe it."

"It is but the truth, lady."

"Nay—here is the smell of trickery and witchcraft, otherwise it were not possible. The man was a warlock, without doubt."

Eric shook his head obstinately. "No warlock he. A warrior like a god. I saw the fight, lady."

"I care not. I sail to avenge him."

For a moment Eric eyed his drinking horn moodily.

"Ha," he roared suddenly. "To avenge him—that is another thing. And a fair thought. I am with you, lady."

The soft summer rain fell steadily, cleansing the street of

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blood and turning the churchyard with its open graves into a sea of mud. The flaring rushes smoked in the wet and the dead lay in orderly lines to await their shriving.

The priest gabbled the Latin words perfunctorily, because the only man who could understand them was watching on the foreshore, and in a hut beyond the village he had a woman waiting for him. Besides, it was far too late and much too wet to—

"If these men had not died for you, priest," suddenly grated a cold and deadly voice behind him, "know you what the Vikings would have done?"

"Nay, lord. Your pardon lord—"

"They do not like priests in the Northland, priest. They claim their gods are older. After flicking out your eyeballs with their dagger-points they would have hoisted you up by an ankle and roasted you over a slow fire. I have seen it done."

"Indeed, lord—I am truly—"

"Therefore, priest," the cold and merciless voice went on, "see that you speed the souls of these brave men, who died that you might live, on their way to their eternal sleep with the sweet Jesus with a fervour and a sincerity befitting the solemnity of the occasion."

"Yea, lord."

"You will find words majestic in their enunciation, sublime in their conception, inspiring in their grace. Speak them now, priest, with all your heart and soul, that the brothers and the sons and the wives and the parents of these dead men—who died for you, priest—can all understand what they mean, even in the Latin tongue."

In the evening of that same day, after the feasting, they all assembled on the headland beyond the harbour, while in a cove by the open sea some made ready the boat. Kindling and wood were piled to the oar-locks, the small sail set, and the oar lashed. The Jarl was thonged to the stern, with his sword across his knees.

Hilde thrust the flaring torch into the kindling with a steady hand; the ropes were loosed and the boat glided off into the west.

A tongue of flame curled up, wavered and smoked, and then blazed forth fiercely. The wind fanned the fire.

The blazing boat sped into the darkness like some giant torch, the water gleaming redly about her, as if she floated on a pool of blood.

The torch burned fiercely, yet grew ever smaller. They all watched, without moving.

Soon there was only a red spark on the horizon. Then the spark died, and a vast darkness

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descended and spread a mantle over sea and sky.

"I would go to the Saxon king—he who holds the town of Lunden on the great river. But now I dare not leave. They will be back."

"Aye, lord. He had a sword of gold."

"They will avenge him. I must wait."

"Why would you go, lord?"

"To tell the king he must have ships. He must steal ships and buy ships and build ships."

"To what end, lord?"

"To guard this kingdom, which is surrounded by the sea. What we have done, others do not or cannot or will not do. It is useless to guard the harbours. The Northmen build flat-bottomed and land on the beaches. But a fleet of ships patrolling at sea from the mouth of the great river, to intercept with iron rams—"

"It would take many ships, lord."

"It is the only way. The king must build them."

"How, lord?"

"There are Phoenicians who trade in the west for the tin. For gold they would sell their grandmothers. And yet they are the finest sailors in the world. He could buy some of them to train our own. And these Northmen—some we should stun and not kill. Then in captivity we should flog them until they build us ships, as only they know how. If we had ships we could stop them."

"It is a good thought, lord."

"It is the only thought to save this kingdom."

"Aye, lord. Once they have come you must ride."

In the morning Hilde sought out her giant thrall Sven.

"Sven," she said, "how much longer have you to serve?"

"Two years, lady."

"Sail with me on a quest—and on our return you are a freed man."

The giant's eyes glowed, as if a flame strove to burn behind the ashes of captivity.

"What quest, lady?"

"We go to slay a murderer in a far land."

Sven had been a great warrior in his native Friesland. Fifteen men had not lived to tell of the foray in which he was captured. Now he flung his great arms high in the air, dwarfing the girl's slender form.

"Good. I go to sharpen my axe."

The whole steading had become a hive of activity. The longship was clinker-built, caulked with hair, and fastened with iron. Stores and water-casks were piled aboard, the irons greased with new ropes riven.

The women worked every day

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far into the night, burnishing breastplates and rubbing oil into leather harness. The warriors sharpened their weapons.

Light-footed messengers fleetly bore the war-torch like a twinkling phantom light up hill and down dale, by perilous paths and through wooded slopes to lonely outlying homesteads, for Hilde was to lead the foray and all men were eager to avenge the death of the Jarl.

And one evening the longship glided slowly out of the harbour, the great gilded prow set towards the dying sun.

In the stern stood Eric, gleaming in his war-gear, and beside and above him, tall though he was, towered the head and shoulders of Sven the giant thrall, leaning on the haft of his battle-axe. Between them stood the slight form of Hilde, her kirtle of rich wool, a shawl of silk hiding her golden hair.

"We lay a course due west, lady," said Eric, "until we sight the shoulder, or if we are driven by the wind southwards, the mouth of the great river. There we take our bearings. From the river we sail south, round the headland, and follow the line of the coast. I shall know the harbour again."

For days the longship ploughed the waves of the lonely sea, until at last the look-out's hail brought them all to the bows.

"It is a rich land, lady," mused Eric reflectively. "Hard by that shoulder, if I remember, there should be an abbey—"

But Hilde laid a hand on his arm. "Nay, Eric, we have gear enough at home. We make straight for the harbour."

The longship veered to the south, past the mouth of the wide river, and followed, far out at sea, the line of the coast. On the next afternoon they bore inland and sailed closely, until Eric pointed with one arm.

"See—there is the harbour."

A square church nestled amidst a cluster of roofs. Behind the village the green downs slept tranquilly in the bright light of the sun. The river sparkled and swirled inland before it surged muddily to meet the sea.

The longship's keel grated as they beached her on the shingle of the foreshore. Slipping and sliding and sinking deeply with the weight of their war-gear, the warriors trod heavily up the slope to where the tough wiry grass bound the stones sufficiently to give a firm surface.

There was no sound. The village slept peacefully in the sun. The church with its hard square tower seemed to sunder the soft blue of the sky, keeping eternal watch and ward. And behind everything dreamed the downs.

Eric and Sven were in the fore.

"Ready, men," growled the

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former. " 'Twas so before. They are in hiding, waiting for us."

Up the one deserted street, by the low stone wall, they strode, and behind them followed the warriors. And after the warriors came proud Hilde.

Suddenly, in the bright warm glare of the sun, she shivered, as if with cold.

Then, cleaving the s i l e n c e, came the rich twang of a bow-string, like the deep thrum of mighty harp cord.

Eric clutched his throat, stared stupidly at the four-foot shaft protruding from it, and crashed to the ground like a falling tree. A hail of shafts followed the first and two of the warriors fell.

Suddenly the street was filled with men—men with s t r a n g e weapons, bills and staves and iron bars and clubs, but men who stood shoulder to shoulder in lines like solid squares. The Vikings roared in anger and the fight began.

From the churchyard rode the man on his high black horse. His chain-mail glittered in the sun, but his head was bare. Lean and grim were his features, tanned to the colour of bronze, and his nose jutted like the beak of an eagle.

Hilde called on a high note to Sven, who set his foot on a body and wrenched his axe free.

"Where, lady?"

"There—on the black horse. That must be Jarl's murderer."

The clatter of hooves was lost amidst the scream and roar of the fighting as the black horse galloped down the street. The man's dark eyes saw Hilde and the giant thrall. He reined in, slipped down from his horse, and came to meet them with a short straight sword.

Sven sprang and his axe-head whirled. The other man moved his body but not his feet, and his straight sword glittered in the sun. But Sven recovered like a cat and leapt aside. Before he could aim another stroke the sword flashed again, incredibly swift, like a wheel of light. Sven swayed, choked on his blood, and crashed to the ground.

Suddenly Hilde became aware that there was no more fighting, that there was no more noise, that there was nothing—nothing but that great and b r o o d i n g silence, that stillness which was part of the place, that tranquillity which somehow belonged to the square and massive church with its flint tower and to those fresh green slopes of rolling earth, so bare and clean, and yet so comforting and friendly.

The man came to stand beside her, the short sword sheathed by his side.

"What are you doing here—a woman?"

His voice was cold, and in the hard dark eyes she could see no mercy. His speech clipped the

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northland vowels strangely.

"You—you speak our tongue?"

"In captivity one learns many things. Who are you?"

"I am the daughter of the Jarl of Hfalgersfjord. I came to avenge his murder."

"He with the lion on his breast and the golden sword? He who came with the last full moon?"

"Yeah."

"I seemed to remember that sail and the lines of that prow. Here was no murder, woman. He came to slay and rob and burn—and he met with justice."

"You murdered him."

"Not I, woman. I killed him in fair fight."

"He was my father. He was the greatest warrior in the Northland."

For the first time since the Jarl had come home, Hilde longed for tears with which to weep. The man's dark eyes softened as he looked at her, yet his voice was still cold and hard as he spoke.

"Once I lived further down the coast, in the westland. Once I too had a father and a wife and children—before the Northmen came. Then I had nothing. Dead bodies for a family. Smouldering ashes for a home. I came here. I found this village sleeping in the sun. Here I thought that a man might learn to forget.

"I set watchmen in the church-tower and I trained these men to fight. Not like a rabble, but like soldiers. I trained them myself in the way my father had trained me—in the way I had trained my vines to stand in line on the shoulder of the hill.

"I drilled them as they used to drill the legionaries, when my ancestor was a centurion and bore this very sword. When one man dies, another takes his place and the square endures.

"He carried this sword—over the Alps, by the sands of the Nile, in the black forests of the Allemani, and up to the great wall in the north. He slew with it—but always in fair fight. I have not dishonoured it yet. But to steal like a vulture on unarmed men and women and children—to rob and to burn and to slay—"

The contempt in the hard voice lashed her like a whip. Suddenly the warm stone of the wall felt cold beneath her hand. She heard her own voice, usually so quick and imperious, hesitating strangely, as if she were repeating a lesson.

"It is the way we have always lived. It is the way of the Northmen. Our land is harsh and bare and poor. And he was my father."

The man stared at her and his voice changed. "And you came to avenge him. That was brave of you, woman. It is the way of the Northmen. It is a good breed—and strong. But this kingdom will be great when the

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Northmen have been scattered and broken into nations. Look—"

He flung an arm wide. "This is a good land—rich and fair and strong. The people in it are kind and simple and slow to wrath. Yet once they are trained, when they fight they win—because they fight for their homes and their wives and their children. And that is a better cause than fighting for plunder."

Again he flung out his arm, this time towards the sea. "There is your longship. Look well on her—for the last time. My fishermen will sail her round the coast to the great river, where the Saxon king has need of ships as well built as yours."

"But I—"

"You will remain here. You are neither my captive nor my slave. In my house everyone is free. You will be my wife, if you wish. This land has need of women with your spirit, to breed sons worthy of it."

It was then that Hilde at long last felt the slow blinding tears well up to her eyes in aching relief.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

With entire justification Agatha Christie, in private life Mrs. Max Mallowan, has been called the Queen of Crime. I met her many years ago, when I made my home in England, and have been proud to count her a friend ever since. In person she is as likeable, as engaging, as her books are tricky, not to say sneaky, using both adjectives in high praise.

She herself will probably recall a game of Murder, according to new, different, more elaborate rules, played at my London apartment one night toward the end of the 1930's, with J. B. Priestley officiating as detective. The outcome of that game I have forgotten; Mrs. Mallowan's testimony stays vividly in mind. Challenged to account for her whereabouts at the time of the murder, she replied that she had spent the night with the Archbishop of Canterbury—praying.

Though an ecclesiastical alibi might have been more appropriate to Miss Sayers than to the creatrix of Hercule Poirot, I seem to remember she got away with it. Hercule Poirot and his little gray cells, as well as Agatha Christie and *her* little gray sells, have been bamboozling everybody since the appearance of her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles,* in 1920.

It is fitting, half a century later, that her American publishers, Dodd, Mead & Co., should reissue her works in the uniform Greenway Edition, modestly priced at $3.95 each. A dozen are available as this is written (April), with more to come. Since those now at hand include my own favorite, *Death on the Nile,* I can pay some small tribute to a great craftsman by choosing it as the subject of my lead review this month.

There will always be debate about Agatha Christie's best detective story. Despite claims for *The A.B.C. Murders* or *Cards on the Table,* I still maintain that *Death on the Nile,* originally published in 1937, contains her most effective surprise finale. At once we are caught up by emotion, not only the broken triangle of Jacqueline de Bellefort versus Linnet and Simon Doyle, but the emotions of other British or American characters thrown together in conflict as the Nile steamer *Karnak* leaves Assuan on its voyage of bloodshed

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and panic. Though our enchantress gives us all the facts, hers is a siren voice which seems to be saying one thing while carefully saying something else. Even though you are adept at outguessing authors, be careful!

As there will always be debate about her best novel, so there will always be debate about her most famous. Is *Roger Ackroyd* fair, or does it violate the first rule of the game? While refusing to join in the argument, old devotees will remember that Mrs. Mallowan herself, several years before *Ackroyd,* anticipated her own device with a variation of the same theme which is still more ingenious, entirely fair, and may startle readers as late as 1970. I give no title; I name no names; I simply state the fact.

"Since we know the secret of *Roger Ackroyd,*" you may exclaim, "how can any variation of that theme have the least degree of novelty? Unless she fastens the crime on Mr. Dodd or Mr. Mead, perhaps even on Mr. Cerf of Random House or Miss Kahn of Harper, what in Satan's name can she possibly do?"

Well, she can; she has done it. You are safe with any Christie novel, old or new. For the Queen of Crime does not age; she remains just as tricky, fully as sneaky, as in that fine unblushing past. I can think of nobody else who has entertained us so consistently, or so well, for a whole half century of homicide.

Of three new novels worth your attention this time round, it is not easy to classify *The Women or Peasenhall,* by R. J. White (Harper & Row, 4.95). Reconstructing a famous (Still unsolved) tragedy of rural Suffolk in 1902, the author deals with real persons under their real names, stumbling down dark roads to a doubtful end.

Rose Harsent, the philandering servant girl, did in fact have her throat cut that night at Providence House. William Gardiner, sanctimonious carpenter and Sunday School superintendent, twice stood on trial for murder, free at last because both juries disagreed. Though probably the philanderer they said he was, Gardiner is unlikely to have committed that murder. Using as little fiction as possible, Mr. White attempts almost classic detection and finds a new answer.

It is not without errors. No sophisticated character in 1902 would have talked of Henry Irving doing *The Bells* at Drury Lane; it is as though a sophisticated character of later date referred to John Barrymore playing *Hamlet* at Minsky's. And some of the slang is modren rather than turn-of-the-century. But the author catches every furtive aspect of village life below the surface. At one time

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they really did carry on as they carry on here; in all likelihood, God help 'em, they still do.

Queen's Pawn, by Victor Canning (Morrow, $5.95) gives us mystery-adventure with speed, power, and impact. Andrew Raikes, our protagonist, is a gentlemanly crook who in most ways does happen to be a gentleman. About to retire before his fortieth birthday with a fortune from many con games, Raikes finds himself caught by the vicious, dwarfish, soft-voiced John Sarling. Just one more operation, with Sarling to direct; *then* he may retire to Devon and Mary Warburton.

Of course Raikes knows it's impossible. In the grip of a leech who can destroy him, he will never escape—unless, with the aid of a dependable old associate and of auburn-haired Belle Vickers, he plots in his own turn to crush the leech forever.

It can be done and is done, with ugliness but expertise. Though one menace has gone, another and worse menace forces him along lines determined from the first: somebody's move against the great new Cunarder, *Queen Elizabeth 2.* Mr. Canning, specialist in shocks, reserves one last shock for the closing pages. And Raikes, doomed soul or not, holds our sympathy until the end.

Combining action, espionage, and all sorts of dirty work work behind the scenes, Richard Meade's *The Lost Fraulein* (Random House, $4.95) fully lives up to the high standard he set with *The Danube Runs Red.* Again we meet John Allison, American arms merchant with much experience in using the commodity he sells. Allison needs his combat knowledge from the first chapter, when they try to blast him on a country road in Texas, to the climax in Acanara, West Africa, and that spectacular battle piece on the plain.

With only limited hope of a market, he has bought twenty obsolete Sherman tanks the Pentagon no longer needs. Those tanks, obviously, will turn up where they shouldn't. Pressured by the Great White Chiefs of the State Department to join the Great Black Chiefs of Acanara during civil war, Allison has been driven into an impossible corner. And through everything wanders the lost faulein herself: Erika Wolf, German sex-bomb, with her amatory talent and her strangly guilty conscience. You won't regret her presence in this suberb thriller.

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the second "hitherto unrecorded" case of

PHILO VANCE

Here is another of Jon L. Breen's past-master pastiches for which he has so sure a hand, so sure a 'tec touch. This is the second about S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance—another "hitherto undiscovered account of one of Philo Vance's greatest triumphs"—a brilliant example of Vance's "instant detection." As we said about the first Philo Vance pasticcio, you will find this fascinating reading—no parody pot shots this time, but again every tone and accent the right "McWright," the real "McDine"...

CHARACTERS OF THE STORY

PHILO VANCE

BRYCE GORDON
A novelist.

AMBROSE FURLEY
A subsidy publisher.

ANN VERNON
A journalist.

ELOISE CHRISTOPHER
An elderly lady.

PROFESSOR ANDREW SLADE
A scholar.

GUY COOPERSMITH
A fanatic.

ERNEST HEATH
Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau.

JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM
District Attorney of New York County.

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THE VANITY MURDER CASE

by JON L. BREEN

WHEN PHILO VANCE FIRST learned of my intention to make public some accounts of his briefer criminal investigations,* he urged me to include among them the murder of Ambrose Furley, a pioneer in the field of subsidy book publishing.

"Y'know, Van, the demise of Furley may have spelled *finis* as it were to Furley and Company, but the 'vanity' publishing houses are still goin' strong, and although most of them at least flirt with legitimacy, there are still a few scoundrels who are as unscrupulous and vicious as the unlamented Furley himself. The case may not have been too spectacular an example of my peculiar talents, but there's a message in it for literary novices everywhere."

Vance is too modest about his own contribution. Actually, his incredibly rapid solution of the Furley mystery—The Vanity Murder Case, as it was called in the press—included a gem of psychological deductive reasoning.

It began one morning with a visit from Bryce Gordon, an old Harvard classmate of Vance and me, who had recently made the best-seller lists with his novel entitled *The Children of Medea*—after years of unsuccessful forays at authorship and a patchwork of assorted jobs including cab-driving, door-to-door brush-selling, stage magic, and cross-country lecturing to Women's Clubs.

"I don't want to gloat, Vance, but I guess I was right and you were wrong," said Gordon.

"About what, old chap?" inquired Vance innocently.

"You told me I'd be throwing my money away if I published my novel through Furley after every commercial publisher turned it down. Have you seen the latest best-seller list in *The Times?*"

"Oh, yes, ol' dear. And my warmest congratulations on your most inspirin' success story. But I haven't changed my opinion of the vanity publishing business. For every case like yours, a thousand poor souls get separated from their money by promises of glory and grandeur. In almost every case, a really worthy work of literature will be published by a reputable publisher—at *their* cost—even if they lose money."

*Beginning with *The Austin Murder Case* (EQMM, December 1967).

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"Not necessarily true, Vance. What about *The Children of Medea* then? You yourself said it deserved an audience."

"And it found one, because the time was right for it. Deucedly dense on the part of the established publishers not to see that; they usually read their trends a bit more accurately. But Furley would have published your book even if it were unalloyed rubbish, provided you came up with the filthy lucre to finance your folly—and no doubt he'd have assured you of your unappreciated literary genius while he was doin' it! No, Gordon, I won't sing a paean for Mr. Furley, undiluted blackguard that he is, just because one worthwhile manuscript happened to fall into his grubby hands."

"You'll never admit you're wrong, will you, Vance? Maybe if you *met* my benefactor you'd change your opinion."

"Benefactor? You did all the benefactin', I venture. But 'pon my soul, meetin' the chap might prove a most enlight'nin' experience. You have something in mind?"

"He's having a luncheon for me and a few of his recent authors—"

"— for whom I dare say 'suckers' might be a more exact appellation," Vance drawled.

"I'll ignore that. It's set for André's Restaurant next Friday noon. Why don't you and Van Dine join us? Ambrose says he'll be glad to meet you."

"And we'd be altogether charmed to meet Ambrose Furley. See you then, old boy."

André's Restaurant boasted one of the finest French cuisines in all New York in those days. Its dining-rooms were large and grandly appointed, but its prices were astonishingly reasonable even for those depression times. "Mr. Furley is a good businessman with an eye for a bargain," Vance told me *sotto voce* as we entered.

The Furley party occupied a circular table in a private dining-room on the second floor of André's. There were eight chairs around the table, three of them occupied when Vance and I arrived.

Ambrose Furley was a short, rather plump man, precisely dressed in a well-tailored grey suit, complete with vest and watch-chain. His hands appeared flabby and soft, but his handshake—the two-handed kind, often favored by politicians—was surprisingly firm.

"Such a pleasure, Mr. Vance! I've read about so many of your cases." He chuckled. "I sometimes read what the other publishers publish."

"Well, my dear chap, I hope you sometimes read what you publish as well. Not too much of it, though."

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Bryce Gordon was also there to greet us, with a beautiful dark-haired girl sitting next to him. "Now, Vance!" he laughed. "Already starting the verbal duel?"

Furley chuckled. "Jest all you wish, Mr. Vance. A publisher with Bryce Gordon on his list can afford to be twitted."

"This is Ann Vernon, Vance," Gordon said. "Mr. Furley is going to bring out her first volume of poetry soon."

"I just hope it enjoys the success of *The Children of Medea,*" Miss Vernon cooed, beaming at Gordon.

"You know, my dear," said Furley, "we can't all be best-sellers. But I think a poet of your talent can expect a reasonably good sale. Of course, the audience for poetry, even poetry as fine as yours, is not as large as the audience for novels. It's a pity, but it's a fact of life."

"I'll be happy if I just get my investment back," the girl said. "It's costing me eight hundred dollars for the first edition, Mr. Vance."

"I'm sure you will, my dear," said Furley hastily. "But even if you should not, think of the pride you and your friends and family can take in your very own published book!"

A newcomer entered the room, an elderly lady. As the others went forward to greet her, Vance turned to me and whispered, "That young lady with Gordon appears to me entirely too intelligent to be taken in by all this folderol, Van. I think she's up to something with this ingénue act of hers. This is going to be a most inter'stin' gatherin', eh, what?"

"Miss Eloise Christopher, meet Mr. Vance and Mr. Van Dine," Furley said.

The elderly lady's eyes lit up. "Philo Vance! Oh, this *is* exciting! Wait till I tell the other girls! And, Mr. Van Dine, you write those wonderful books about Mr. Vance, don't you? How much do they cost you?"

Vance murmured, "Mr. Van Dine is too modest to speak, Miss Christopher, but I must tell you that Charles Scribner's Sons pay Mr. Van Dine for the privilege of publishing his books. Mr. Van Dine doesn't pay them a penny."

"Why, Mr. Furley tells me that my book on flower arrangements will cost two thousand dollars to publish. That's all the money I have saved."

"You see, Eloise," Furley said smoothly, "Mr. Van Dine is an established writer—he has had many books published. This is only your first. So we ask you to assume part of the risk. If your first book is successful, then later you may write other books, and the publisher—and I hope I continue to have that

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honor—will indeed pay you. In fact, if your first book sells a sufficient number of copies—and the best promotional techniques will be employed by Furley and Company to distribute them—I will be paying you royalties."

"Of course, of course. You explained that to me before, but I'm so forgetful." Miss Christopher shook her head in a troubled manner. "I *wish* I could decide. It would be *so* nice to have a book to give my friends, but it's *so* much money. What do you think I ought to do, Mr. Vance?"

"Well, madam—"

"Eloise," Furley interrupted, "I think Mr. Vance is a bit of a skeptic on the subject of subsidy publishing. I'd think that Bryce Gordon and *The Children of Medea* were argument enough for my cause. But I'd like to remind you that self-publication is almost an American tradition. Some of the greatest names in our grand and glorious American literature either wholly or partially subsidized the publication of their own work. James Fenimore Cooper is an example that springs to mind at once."

"I believe," drawled Vance, "that Cooper was forced into self-publication because of a prejudice in American publishing at that time against native American writers. That condition no longer prevails."

"But other prejudices still do, Mr. Vance. What you say may partially explain the subsidy publications of Cooper and Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant, but what of Edgar Allan Poe and Henry David Thoreau and, in our own century, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair?* I reiterate, sir, that subsidy publishing of literary work is an honored American tradition!

"I might add, Mr. Vance, that subsidy publishing has produced important documents in all phases of scholarly and academic study. Including criminology, one of your own fields of interest. Remember the fellow who killed that architect at Madison Square Garden? He published his autobiography through a subsidy publishing firm."**

"All no doubt very true, my dear man," Vance replied. "But aren't the vanity presses—"

"I prefer not to hear that slan-

*When Philo Vance read over the initial draft of this account, he pointed out that in the 30-odd years since the events of the Furley case occurred, at least one major American novelist (James Drought) has established a reputation through financing publication of his own works. Vance adds, however, that Drought did this on his own rather than through an established subsidy publisher and that such instances remain rare.

**Furley referred here to Harry K. Thaw, who killed Stanford White at Madison Square Garden. His book, *The Traitor*, was published by Dorrance and Company in 1926, though it was subsequently suppressed by the Thaw family.

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derous term, sir!" said Furley, now genuinely angry. "You would accuse Mr. Bryce Gordon, a man with faith in the fruits of his arduous labor, of sordid vanity? You would accuse James Fenimore Cooper—?"

Furley's tirade was interrupted by the entrance of another guest, a short and very slight man with a shiny bald head, horn-rim spectacles, an unkempt moustache, and a diffident manner.

"Professor Slade! Gentlemen and ladies, this is Professor Andrew Slade, one of the most dazzling academic minds in the field of Elizabethan drama. Welcome, sir!"

The Professor smiled shyly as he greeted each of us in turn. He congratulated Gordon on his novel. "A brilliant work indeed, Mr. Gordon. But the title puzzled me a bit—the symbolism of it."

"Well, of course, the theme of the book is objectivity," Gordon explained. "And Medea was the only truly *objective* woman in history or literature."

"Is that so?" said the Professor.

"Think about it! Can you name another? She actually *killed her own children* because she thought their blood was tainted. Wasn't that admirable?"

"If objectivity is the most admirable quality in the world, yes," Vance said pensively. "But is it actually? Is it always?"

"I think it is," said Gordon.

"Tell Mr. Vance about your researches, Professor Slade," said Furley. "I know he'd be interested."

"I'm sure I would," Vance agreed.

"Well, I have a theory," the little Professor offered tentatively.

"A theory," Vance echoed encouragingly.

"Yes. About Shakespeare. I've written a book about it, and I'm arranging with Mr. Furley to publish it."

"And what is your theory?"

A slightly fanatical gleam appeared in Professor Slade's eyes. "Shakespeare didn't write the plays, you see."

"No? Who did then? Bacon?"

"Bacon!" the Professor snorted derisively. "What a fantastic notion that is!"

"Christopher Marlowe then?"

"No, no! Ben Jonson!* It seems so obvious when you consider the evidence . . ." And Professor Slade proceeded to elucidate. Once he began, he seemed disinclined, indeed unable, to stop. He seemed thoroughly convinced of the accuracy of his conclusions.

Miss Christopher appeared disappointed. "I'd always rather hoped that Shakespeare was

*Strange as this theory may sound, it is by no means the most bizarre hypothesis to be advanced about the plays' authorship. One scholarly book quite seriously advanced the notion that the greatest Elizabethan playwright was actually Queen Elizabeth herself.

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Shakespeare," she said mournfully.

The Professor's monologue was fortuitously interrupted by the appearance of the final guest. He was a young man of medium height and build with black hair and dark eyes. His eyes constantly held that fanatical spark which had appeared in Professor Slade's only when the subject under discussion was his own pet theory.

Ann Vernon seemed very attracted to the newcomer, and a flash of jealousy crossed the face of Bryce Gordon.

"This is Guy Coopersmith," Furley announced. "A very gifted political and economic theorist."

The use of the last word apparently was a *faux pas* on Furley's part. Coopersmith exclaimed, "Activist! You *wish* I were only a theorist, you pitiful little man! Comes the revolution, I'll destroy you!" Then he seemed to get a grip on himself. "Figuratively speaking, of course. When my so-called theories come into practice, all men will live in peace and enjoy the fruits of their labors equally."

"Are you a Socialist?" said a wide-eyed and scandalized Miss Christopher.

"I, madam, am an Acurrentialist. I seek the destruction of all present monetary systems. Only by eliminating the outmoded concept of money can we all work together in harmony."

"Tut! Tut! My dear man," Vance said sorrowfully, "must you therefore destroy everyone's money? Not merely throw your own away to Mr. Furley?"

"Really, Vance!" Furley retorted. "You're becoming downright offensive!"

Bryce Gordon chortled happily, as if he relished the clash. "Sorry I invited this blood-hound, Ambrose?"

Furley controlled his temper with obvious effort. "Of course not. All I have to do, Bryce, is remind myself of *The Children of Medea,* and I know I need not justify myself against sneering charges by Mr. Vance. And I might say to you, Vance, that Coopersmith is hardly throwing his money away. I'm offering him a platform for his ideas. I don't happen to agree with them, but I feel they should be disseminated. And if I wind up burning my money, that's the chance I have to take."

With good humour apparently restored throughout the group, Furley suggested we order lunch. The meal proceeded without incident and everyone seemed to enjoy the food. We sat in this order around the table, starting with Furley and reading clockwise: Furley, Gordon, Miss Vernon, Coopersmith, Miss Christopher, myself, Vance, and Slade. Vance and the Professor continued to discuss the latter's theory

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animatedly, while Coopersmith and Miss Christopher discussed, rather surprisingly, flower arrangement. Gordon and Miss Vernon exchanged confidences in tones too low for anyone else to hear.

At the conclusion of the meal, after coffee had been served, poured by Miss Vernon and passed from hand to hand, our host rose to address us. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am happy you were all able to be with me to-day. Indeed, I welcome friends and skeptics alike. I am glad that those of you who were heretofore unacquainted with Mr. Bryce Gordon have enjoyed this opportunity of meeting him. Bryce has vindicated my life's work and brought a new pride and prestige to the whole subsidy publishing industry.

"Not that Furley and Company has not had its past successes—oh, no, indeed. Major Titus Upson's twenty-five volume history of the Great War has brought us countless orders from college and university libraries.* Mary Acheson's books on health foods, the best known of which was *The Joys of Grass,* have given us great occasion for pardonable pride. But the discovery of a novelist, a literary artist, of Bryce Gordon's stature and importance, tends to put all these other achievements in the shade, as it were. You writers who are new to the literery scene—Ann, Eloise, Professor Slade Mr. Coopersmith—all of you can indeed feel pride in having your volumes brought out by the publisher of Bryce Gordon's distinguished work.

"I have asked Bryce to say a few words to us this afternoon, so without further ado—"

"Mr. Furley, may I please say something first?" Ann Vernon said tentatively and rather shyly.

Furley seemed taken aback, though not alarmed. "Why, yes, Ann, I think so. This is rather unexpected, but I feel it's quite appropriate that a new writer should pay tribute to Mr. Gordon." As the girl rose, Furley resumed his seat.

"Tribute is not precisely what I had in mind, Mr. Furley, though I must say I found *The Children of Medea* admirable." The ingénue pose had suddenly disappeared, and Furley was squirming in his chair, not knowing what was coming but finally sensing in Ann Vernon the formidability that Vance had seen there from the beginning. "I have the impression that the people here to-day, with the exception of Bryce, have not yet signed contracts for the publication of their books. I know that I, for one, have not

*Subsequent investigation showed that the only university library to interest itself in Major Upson's work was one endowed by the Upson family.

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as yet paid my eight hundred dollars. Have any of you others paid your tariffs yet? Miss Christopher?"

"Why, no. I've been trying to decide if I could afford—"

"Good. Professor?"

"No, but a check for thirty-five hundred dollars is in my pocket, Miss Vernon. I planned to give it to Mr. Furley to-day."

"Mr. Coopersmith?"

"No, I haven't. What's this all about?"

"I might as well start at the beginning. I'll be brief, though. My name really is Ann Vernon and I am a writer, though hardly a poet. I write feature articles for the New York *Gazette* and my editor suggested I do an article on the subsidy publishing business." She said these last words with a slight irony. "I'll spare Mr. Furley's feelings and not use the offensive term 'vanity press' which is in more common usage.

"It occurred to me that the best way to do this might be to submit a manuscript to one of the subsidy publishers, so I sent in a collection of my poems. The single drawback was that I had never written any poems; so I sat down in the *Gazette* city room and wrote the Complete Poetical Works of Ann Vernon. It took me, I should say, twenty mintues. I wonder if you'd like to hear one of my poems?"

Furley, who had suffered in silence until now, managed to bleat out, "Please, Miss Vernon, *please*!"

Ann Vernon ignored him. "One of my personal favourites goes as follows:

My heart is a weary wanderer,
Floundering in the greenery and
frightening the fawns.

I love the flowers
And the trees and their
bowers—
I could look at them for hours.
Couldn't you
For minutes a few?

Isn't that lovely? All my poetry was in the same mindless vein, and to be absolutely sure I hadn't created works of aesthetic beauty by sheer accident, I showed it to the *Gazette* literary critic, who assured me that my poetry was just what it was intended to be: unadulterated rubbish!

"Now would you like to hear what Mr. Furley said about my poetry? I'll quote: 'All of our readers were enraptured by your poetry. For sweep, gusto, lyricism and poetic feeling it rivals the best verse being written to-day. Furley and Company would be honoured to bring your work to the eager public that hungers for it . . .' I could go on and on. It wasn't until his third letter that Mr. Furley got around to dollars

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and cents—to be exact, eight hundred of the former.

"The way my incredibly bad manuscript was treated led me to investigate further. I interviewed many so-called authors whose works Furley had put in book form, and I learned that my worst suspicions were true. Mr. Furley has made countless thousands of dollars in the last fifteen years through human gullibility, and I am happy to take this opportunity to demonstrate that fact. My article will appear in print next week,* but I offer you people this advance notice so you won't make the mistake of investing your hard-earned money in the empty promises of this wretched confidence man."

Stunned silence fell over the group as Ann Vernon sat down, trembling with anger and satisfaction. Furley, looking stricken, rose and finally found his voice. "But what then of *The Children of Medea?*"

"A fluke!" said Ann Vernon. "A publishing accident."

"Yes," said Bryce Gordon. "A fluke." His voice was hard. Furley seemed to realize that he was without an ally in the room, reading the shocked revulsion in the face of Eloise Christopher, the contempt in Guy Coopersmith's visage, the miserable defeat in the little Professor's sad eyes.

So often after hideous crimes have taken place, it seems that a sense of foreboding is recalled by the bystanders, something in the air that should have told them a grim event was about to take place. On this occasion, I confess I had no such feeling. The scene was dramatic enough, but in some ways more comic than tragic. Had I but known of the murderous intent in the heart of one of my luncheon companions, I might have had some inkling of what was about to happen—I might have been able to call up a suitable quotient of foreboding. But I did not, and watched what took place with a sudden shocked horror.

Furley raised his coffee cup, as if seeking solace in the hot liquid. He took one drink, gasped, clutched his throat, and fell dead before our shocked eyes. Someone had put cyanide in the vanity publisher's coffee.

Of all the murders investigated by Philo Vance, the poisoning of Ambrose Furley was solved the fastest. Although the publisher's death at first appeared to be suicide, or, if not that, a most mysterious murder, Vance knew at once who had killed Furley and he was ready to explain it

*As it turned out, Ann Vernon's article never appeared in print. However, several years later, the results of a similar experiment, by John A. Fuller, appeared in *Saturday Review* (August 1, 1959; pp. 8-9).

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to Sergeant Ernest Heath* as soon as the doughty Sergeant appeared on the scene and before the redoubtable Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Emanuel Doremus, had even been summmoned from his bed.**

Rather regretfully, Vance instructed Heath to arrest the guilty person, who made no attempt to resist or even to claim innocence.

"How did you know, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked.

Vance puffed his *Régie* and blew several wreaths of smoke toward the ceiling before he replied to the Sergeant's question.

"It's so extr'ordin'rily simple, Sergeant," Vance said, almost listlessly. "I rather hate to tarnish my omniscient aura by explainin' it to you, but I suppose I shall. Yes, quite so.

"Well, to begin with, the murderer had to have prior knowledge of the sort of confidence man Mr. Furley really was. There was no opportunity, y'see, to slip the cyanide into the coffee cup after the lady made her revelations, since all eyes were then on Furley. Before that, the coffee cups had been passed around the table and there was ample time for all sorts of hanky-panky. Also, one doesn't carry cyanide around in one's pocket all day unless one is plannin' to use it, so the murderer must have known beforehand what he was goin' to do.

"Now most of the guests were unknown to each other before to-day. The murderer, to realize the extent and magnitude of Mr. Furley's villainy, might have gotten that knowledge through access to Miss Vernon's information. If so, he must have known Miss Vernon."

"Or have been Miss Vernon," Heath suggested.

"My word, yes. But Miss Vernon had no need, psychologically speakin', y'know, to murder Furley. She was ventin' her spleen through the article. So I asked myself, which of those present knew Ann Vernon before to-day? And I perceived only one answer. Not conclusive, of course, certainly not bindin' in court—"

"That'll be Mr. Markham's jurisdiction," Heath pointed out, referring to Vance's close friend, the District Attorney of New York County.

"Quite. My choice of murderer seemed correct psychologically. A man who admired Medea for her superhuman objectivity. A man who might well kill someone he considered his benefactor if he learned that person was actu'lly an evil enemy of society who'd victimized many people and

*An investigator for the Homicide Bureau, Sergeant Heath had figured in many of Vance's cases.

**Dr. Doremus, convinced his services were only required in the dead of night, had taken to sleeping in the daytime.

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doubtless would victimize many more by plantin' in them false hopes of literary success. A man whose personal success inadvertently would aid the swindling of others, and who therefore felt a sense of responsibility, even a sense of guilt.

"And I might add," Vance concluded, "a man who had been a professional magician to whom slippin' a pinch of cyanide into a coffee cup passin' through his hands would be mere child's play. And so, Heath, I regretfully put my finger on my old school chum, Bryce Gordon. And I do this with a heavy but righteous heart."

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METHOD THREE FOR MURDER

by REX STOUT

(continued from page 100)

To do him justice, Kearns handled it as well as could be expected, even better. He surprised me. He didn't utter a peep. The desk saved him from going down. He stayed propped against it for three seconds, straightened with his hand on it for support, moved his head backward and forward twice, decided his neck was still together, and moved.

His first few steps were wobbly, but by the time he reached the door to the hall they were steadier, and he made the turn okay. I went to the hall and stood, as he got his hat from the shelf and let himself out, pulling the door shut without banging it, and re-entered the office as Irving was saying, "I should beg your pardon. I do. I'm sorry."

"You were provoked," Wolfe told him. He gestured at the red leather chair. "Be seated."

"Hold it." I was there. "I guess I should beg your pardon, Mr. Irving, for not telling you he was here, and now I just beg it again. I have to tell Mr. Wolfe something that can't wait. It won't take long." I went and opened the door to the front room. "If you'll step in here."

He didn't like the idea. "My business is pressing," he said.

"So is mine. If you please?"

"Your name is Archie Goodwin?"

"Yes."

He hesitated a second, and then came, and crossed the sill, and I closed the door. Since it and the wall were soundproofed, I didn't have to lower my voice to tell Wolfe, "I want to report. I saw his wife."

"Indeed. Will a summary do?"

"No." I sat. "It will for one detail, that eighty feet from where the cab was parked there is a stoneyard that would be perfect cover, you couldn't ask for better, but you must have my talk with Mrs. Irving verbatim."

"Go ahead."

I did so, starting with a description of her. It had been years since he had first told me that when I described a man he must see him and hear him, and I had learned the trick long ago. I also knew how to report conversations word for word—much longer ones than the little chat I had had with Mrs. Irving.

When I had finished he asked one question. "Was she lying?"

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"I wouldn't bet either way. If so, she is good. If it was a mixture, I'd hate to have to sort it out."

"Very well." He closed his eyes. "Bring him."

I went and opened the door to the front room and told him to come, and he entered, crossed to the red leather chair, sat, and aimed his eyes at Wolfe. "I should explain," he said, "that I am here as a friend of Miss Mira Holt, but she didn't send me."

Wolfe nodded. "She mentioned your name last evening. She said you are an intelligent man."

"I'm afraid she flatters me." Evidently it was normal for him to sit still. "I have come to you for information, but I can't pretend I have any special right to it. I can only tell you why I want it. When I learned on the radio this morning that Miss Holt was in custody I started downtown to see her, to offer my help, but on the way I decided that it wouldn't be advisable because it might be misconstrued, since I am merely a friend.

"So I called on my lawyer instead. His name is John H. Darby. I explained the situation and asked him to see Miss Holt, and he arranged to see her and has talked with her, but she won't tell him anything. She even refused to authorize him to arrange bail for her. She says that Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe are representing her, and she will say nothing and do nothing without their advice."

I touched my lips with a fingertip, the lips that Mira had kissed. I was blowing the kiss back to her. Not only had she put my name first, but also she had improved on my suggestion by combining Method Three and Method One. She was a client in a thousand. She had even turned down two offers to spring her.

"I'm not a lawyer," Wolfe said, "and neither is Mr. Goodwin."

"I'm aware of that. But you seem to have hypnotized Miss Holt. With no offense intended, I must ask, are you acting in her interest or in Waldo Kearns's?"

Wolfe grunted. "Hers. She hired us."

I put in, "You and Kearns agree. He thinks we hypnotized her too. Nuts."

He regarded me. "I prefer to deal with Mr. Wolfe. This is his office."

"You're dealing with both of us," Wolfe told him. "Professionally we are indiscrete. What information do you want?"

"I want to know why you are taking no steps to get her released and what action you intend to take in her interest. I also want you to advise her to accept the services of my lawyer. He is highly qualified."

Wolfe rested his palms on the

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chair arms. "You should know better, Mr. Irving; you're a man of affairs. Before I gave you an inch, let alone the mile you ask for, I would have to be satisfied that your interest runs with hers."

"Damn it, I'm her friend! Didn't she say I am? You said she mentioned me."

"She could be mistaken." Wolfe shook his head. "No. For instance, I don't even know what you have told the police."

"Nothing. They haven't asked me anything. Why should they?"

"Then you haven't told them that Miss Holt told you on the phone Sunday evening that she was going to drive Judith Bram's cab?"

It got him. He stared. He looked at me and back at Wolfe. "No," he said. "Even if she had, would I tell the police?"

"Do you deny that she did?"

"I neither deny it nor affirm it."

Wolfe upturned a palm. "How the devil can you expect candor from me? Do you want me to suspect that Miss Holt lied when she told us of that phone call?"

"When did she tell you?"

"Last evening. Here. Not under hypnosis."

He considered. "All right. She told me that."

"And whom did you tell?"

"No one."

"You're certain?"

"Of course I'm certain."

"Then it won't be easy to satisfy me. Assuming Miss Holt fulfilled her intention and took the cab, and arrived with it at Mr. Kearns's address at eight o'clock, and combining that assumption with the fact that at twenty minutes past nine the cab was standing in front of my house with a dead body in it, where are you? Miss Bram states that she told no one of the arrangement. Miss Holt states that she told no one but you. Is it any wonder that I ask where you are? And, specifically, where you were last evening from eight o'clock on?"

"I see." Irving took a breath, and another. "It's utterly preposterous. You actually suspect me of being involved in the murder of Phoebe Arden."

"I do indeed."

"But it's preposterous! I had no concern whatever with Miss Arden. She meant nothing to me. Not only that, apparently whoever killed her managed to get Miss Holt involved—either managed it or permitted it. Would I do that?" He made his hands into fists and raised them, shook them. "Damn it, I have to know what happened! You know. Miss Holt told you. I have to know!"

"There are things *I* have to know," Wolfe said drily. "I mentioned one: your movements last evening. We have it from your wife, but I prefer it from you.

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That's the rule, and a good one: get the best available evidence."

Irving was staring again. "My wife? You have seen my wife?"

"Mr. Goodwin has. He called at your home this morning to see you, and you had gone. Your wife wished to be helpful. You know, of course, what she told him."

"Did she tell him—" He stopped and started over. "Did she tell him about a phone call she made yesterday afternoon?"

Wolfe nodded. "And one she received. She received one from you and made one to Miss Arden."

Irving inclined his head forward to look at his right hand. At length his head came up. "My lawyer wouldn't like this," he said, "but I'm going to tell you something. I have to if I expect you to tell me anything. If I told you what I told my wife you would check it, and it won't check. I know Miss Holt drove Judy Bram's cab there last evening. I know she got there at five minutes to eight and left at ten minutes to nine. I saw her."

"Indeed. Where were you?"

"I was in a cab parked on Carmine Street, around the corner from Ferrell Street. I suppose you know what her purpose was in driving Judy's cab?"

"To talk with her husband."

"I had tried to persuade her not to. Did she tell you that?"

"Yes."

"I didn't like it. There isn't much that Kearns isn't capable of. I don't mean violence; just some trick like getting her out of the cab and going off with it. I decided to be there, and I phoned my wife that I would have to spend the evening with a business associate. I was afraid if I took my car Miss Holt might recognize it, so I got a taxi with a driver I know. Carmine Street is one-way, and we parked where we would be ready to follow when she came out of Ferrell Street. We were there when she arrived, at five minutes to eight. When she came back, nearly an hour later, she was alone. There was no one in the cab. I supposed Kearns had refused to let her drive him, and I was glad of it."

"What then?"

"I went to my club. If you want to check I'll give you the cab driver's name and address. I rang Judy Bram's number, and I rang Miss Holt's number three or four times, but there was no answer. I supposed they were out somewhere together. And this morning I heard the radio and saw the paper." He breathed. "I hope to heaven I won't have to regret telling you this. If it contradicts anything she told you she's right and I'm wrong. I could be lying, you know, for my own protection."

I was thinking: if so you're an expert.

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Wolfe's eyes were half closed. "It was dark. How could you know no one was in the cab?"

"There's a light at that corner. I have good eyes and so has the driver. She was going slow, for the turn."

"You didn't follow her?"

"No. There was no point in following her if Kearns wasn't with her."

"What would you say if I told you Miss Holt saw you in your parked taxi as she drove by?"

"I wouldn't believe it. When she drove by arriving, I was flat on the seat. It was dark but I didn't risk her seeing me. When she left she didn't drive by. Carmine Street is one-way."

Wolfe leaned back and shut his eyes, and his lips began to work. Irving started to say something, and I snapped at him, "Hold it." Wolfe pushed his lips out and pulled them in, out and in, out and in .... He was earning the twenty-five bucks I had paid him. I had no idea how, but when he starts that lip operation the sparks are flying inside his skull.

Irving tried again. "But I want—"

"Hold it."

"But I don't—"

"Shut up!"

He sat regarding me, not warmly.

Wolfe opened his eyes and straightened. "Mr. Irving." He was curt. "You will get what you came here for, but not forthwith. Possibly within the hour, probably somewhat later. Tell me where I can reach you, or you may—"

"Damn it, no! I want—"

"If you please. Confound it, I've been yelped at enough today. Or you may wait here. That room has comfortable chairs—or one at least. Mr. Goodwin and I have work to do."

"I don't intend—"

"Your intentions have no interest or point. Where can we reach you?"

Irving looked at me and saw nothing hopeful. He arose. "I'll wait here," he said, and headed for the front room.

Having turned my head to see that Irving had shut the door, I turned it back again. "Fine," I said. "We're going to work."

"I'm a dunce," he said. "So are you."

"It's possible," I conceded. "Can you prove it?"

"It's manifest. Why did that policeman stop his car to look inside that cab?"

"Cops do. That's what a prowl car is for. They saw it parked with the hackie gone, and while that's nothing strange they thought it was worth a look. Also it was parked in front of your house. He knew it was your house. He said so."

"Nevertheless, we are dunces not to have questioned it. I want to know if that policeman had

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been prompted. At once."

"It's a point," I admitted. "The papers haven't mentioned it. I doubt if Cramer would—"

"No."

"I could try Lon Cohen."

"Do so."

I swiveled and dialed the *Gazette* number, and got Lon. Wolfe lifted his receiver to listen in. I told Lon I wanted something for nothing. He said I always did and usually got it, but if what I was after this time was an ad under "Situations Wanted" I would have to pay.

"That was just a dirty rumor," I said. "I am permanently in Mr. Wolfe's employ—permanently, that is, in the sense that I may still be here tomorrow. On our present job we're shy a detail. If you'll supply it I'll give you something for the front page if and when. We don't know whether the cop who stopped to uncover Phoebe Arden's body in the taxi had been steered or was just nosy. Do you?"

"Yes, but I'm not supposed to. The D.A. is saving it. He may release it this afternoon. If he does I'll call you."

"We need it now. Not for publication, and we wouldn't dream of quoting you. We're just curious."

"I'll bet you are. I wish I got paid as much for being curious as Wolfe does. Okay. It was a dialed phone call to Canal six, two thousand. Probably a man, but it could have been a woman trying to sound like a man. It said there was a taxi standing in front of nine-eighteen West Thirty-fifth Street with a dead woman in it. As you know, that address has been heard from before. The sergeant radioed a prowl car."

"Has the call been traced?"

"How? Modern improvements. But you'd better ask the D.A."

"A good idea. I will. Many thanks and I won't forget the front page." I hung up and swiveled. "I'll be damned. Where can we buy dunce caps? For a passerby to see it he would have had to open the door and lift the canvas."

Wolfe's lips were tight. "We should have done that hours ago."

"Lon may not have known hours ago."

"True. Even so. Get Mr. Cramer."

I swiveled and dialed. It wasn't as simple as getting Lon Cohen had been. Cramer was in conference and couldn't be disturbed. I was hacking away at it when Wolfe took his phone and said, "This is Nero Wolfe. I have something that will not wait. Ask Mr. Cramer if he prefers that I deal with the District Attorney."

In two minutes there was a bark. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Cramer?" He knew darned well it was.

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"Yes. I'm busy."

"So am I. Is it true that Miss Holt refuses to talk without advice from Mr. Goodwin or me?"

"Yes, it is, and I was just telling Stebbins to get Goodwin down here. And then I'm going—"

"If you please. Mr. Goodwin and I have decided that it is now desirable for Miss Holt to answer any questions you care to ask—or that it will be after we have had a brief talk with her. Since I must be present and since I transact business only in my own office, it will be pointless for you to send for him. If you want her to talk bring her here."

"You're too late, Wolfe. I don't need her to tell me that she drove that cab to your address. I already know it. Her prints are on the steering wheel and the door, and other places. You're too late."

"Has she admitted it?"

"No, but she will."

"I doubt it. She's rather inflexible. I regret having called you to the phone to no purpose. May I make a request? Don't keep Mr. Goodwin longer than necessary. I am about to conclude a matter in which he has an interest and would like him present. I wanted Miss Holt here too, but since I'm too late I'll have to manage without her."

Silence. Prolonged.

"Are you there, Mr. Cramer?"

"Yes. So you're going to conclude a matter?"

"I am. Soon afterwards Miss Holt and Mr. Goodwin and I will talk not by your sufferance but at our will."

"Are you saying that you know who killed Phoebe Arden?"

"'Know' implies certitude. I have formed a conclusion and intend to verify it. It shouldn't take long. But I'm keeping you. Could you do without Mr. Goodwin until, say, four o'clock? It's half-past twelve. By then we should have finished."

Another silence, not quite so long. "I'll be there in fifteen minutes," Cramer said.

"With Miss Holt?"

"Yes."

"Satisfactory. But not in fifteen minutes. I must get Judith Bram and Waldo Kearns. Do you know where they are?"

"Kearns is at his home. He said he would be if we wanted him again. Judith Bram is here. I'll bring her along, and I'll send for Kearns. Now."

"No. People have to eat. Will you lunch with us? And Miss Holt?"

"I will not. Did you ever skip a meal in your life?"

"Many times when I was younger, by necessity. Then I suggest that you arrive with Miss Holt at two o'clock, and arrange for Miss Bram and Mr. Kearns to come at two thirty. Will that be convenient?"

"By God. *Convenient!*"

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A click. He was off. We hung up. I said, "Probably Irving eats too."

"Yes. Bring him."

I went and got him. He marched to Wolfe's desk and demanded, "Well?"

Wolfe's head slanted back. "I forgot, sir, when I said possibly within the hour, that lunch would interfere. It will be a little longer. I have spoken with Inspector Cramer, and he will arrive with Miss Holt at two o'clock. We shall expect you and your wife to join us at two thirty."

His jaw was working. "Miss Holt will be here?"

"Yes."

"Why my wife?"

"Because she has something to contribute. As you know, she had an appointment with Miss Arden which Miss Arden did not keep. That will be germane."

"Germane to what?"

"To our discussion."

"I don't want a discussion. I certainly don't want one with a police Inspector. I told you what I want."

"And you'll get it, sir, but the method and manner are in my discretion. I give you my assurance without qualification that I am acting solely in the interest of Miss Holt, that I expect to free her of any suspicion of complicity in the murder of Phoebe Arden, and that I shall not disclose what you have told me of your movements last evening without your prior permission. Confound it, do I owe you anything?"

"No." His jaw was still working. "I'd rather not bring my wife."

"We'll need her. If you prefer, I'll arrange for Inspector Cramer to send for her."

"No." He breathed. He looked at me and back at Wolfe. "All right. We'll be here." He wheeled and went.

Five of the yellow chairs were in place facing Wolfe's desk, three in front and two behind, and Mira was in the one nearest to Cramer. I had intended the one at my end for her, but Cramer had vetoed it, and since she was his prisoner I hadn't insisted. Of course he was in the red leather chair, and the uninvited guest he had brought along, Sergeant Purley Stebbins, was seated at his right, with his broad burly shoulders touching the wall.

Mira looked fine, considering. Her eyes were a little heavy and the lids were swollen, and her jacket could have stood ironing, and the corners of her mouth pointed down, but I thought she looked fine. Wolfe, seated behind his desk, was glowering at her, but the glower wasn't meant for her. It was merely that he had had to tell Fritz to advance the lunch hour fifteen minutes, and

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then had had to hurry through the corn fritters and sauasage cakes and wild-thyme honey from Greece and cheese and blackberry pie with not enough time to enjoy it properly.

"Was it bad?" he asked her.

"Not too bad," she said. "I didn't get much sleep. The worst was when the morning passed and I didn't hear from you." Her head turned. "Or you, Mr. Goodwin."

I nodded. "I was busy earning my fee. I wasn't worried about you because you had promised you wouldn't forget Method Three."

"I kept my promise."

"I know you did. I'll buy you a drink any time you're thirsty."

"Get on," Cramer growled.

"Have you been told," Wolfe asked her, "that others will join us shortly?"

"No," she said. "Here? Who?"

"Miss Bram, Mr. Kearns, and Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Irving."

Her eyes widened. "Why Mr. and Mrs. Irving?"

"That will appear after they arrive. I thought you should know they're coming. They'll soon be here, and we have two points to cover. First, I need a question answered. When you drove away from Ferrell Street last evening, and meandered in search of a place to dispose of the corpse —don't interrupt me—and finally drove here, did you at any time suspect that you were being followed by another car?"

Her mouth was hanging open. "But you—" she stammered. Her head jerked to me. "Did you know he was—what good did it do to keep my promise?"

"A lot," I told her. "Yes, I knew he was. Everything is under control. Believe me, I would rather lose an arm than lose the right to ask you to promise me something. We know what we're doing. Shall I repeat the question?"

"But—"

"No buts. Leave it to us. Shall I repeat the question?"

"Yes."

I did so, omitting the "don't interrupt me."

"No," she said.

"Proceed," Wolfe told me.

I knew it would have been better to have her closer. She was six yards away. "This one is more complicated and more important. During that drive, from Ferrell Street to here, are you certain that another car was *not* following you? There are various ways of making sure of that. Did you use any of them?"

"No. I never thought of that. I was looking for a place—"

"I know you were. All we want is this: if I told you that a car was following you, all the way, what would you say?"

"I would want to know who it was."

I wanted to go and pat her

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on the head, but it might have been misconstrued. "Okay," I said. "That's one point. The other one is simple. Tell Inspector Cramer what you told us last night, including the phone call to Gilbert Irving to tell him that you were going to drive Judy's cab." I looked at my wrist. "You only have fifteen minutes, so tell it off."

"I won't," she said. "Not until you tell me why you're doing this."

"Then I'll tell him. You'll know why after the others get here. I'll tell you this: someone tried to frame you for murder and this is payday. Anyway, there's not much left, now that the Inspector knows you drove the cab here with the corpse in it. Would we have spilled that if we didn't have a good hold? Go ahead."

Wolfe put in, "Don't interrupt with questions, Mr. Cramer. They can wait. Yes, Miss Holt?"

She still didn't like it, not a bit, but she delivered, starting with Sunday evening. She left gaps. She didn't say that Judy had given her permission to take the cab, merely that she had taken it, and she didn't mention the phone call to Irving; but since I had already mentioned it that didn't matter. The main thing was what had happened after she got to Ferrell Street with the cab, and she covered that completely; and when she got to where she and I had sat on the stoop and talked, Cramer began the questions.

I will not say that he was more interested in tagging me for obstructing justice than he was in solving a murder case, since I don't like to brag, but it sounded like it. He was firing away at her, and Sergeant Stebbins was scrawling in his notebook, when the doorbell rang and I went to answer it. It was Waldo Kearns. When I took him to the office he went to Mira, without so much as a glance for the three men, and put out a hand.

"My dear wife," he said.

"Don't be ridiculous," Mira said.

I can't report whether he handled that as well as he had handled the uppercut by Irving because the bell rang again and I had to leave them, to admit Judy Bram. She had an escort, a Homicide dick I only knew by sight, and he thought he was going to enter with her and I didn't, and while we were discussing it she slipped in and left it to us. We were still chatting when a taxi stopped out front and Mr. and Mrs. Irving got out and headed for the steps. The dick had to give them room to pass, and I was able to shut the door on him without flattening his nose. Since it was quite possible that Irving's appearance would start something I entered the office on their heels.

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Nothing happened. Mira merely shot him a glance and he returned it. Kearns didn't even glance at him. The newcomers stood while Wolfe pronounced their names for Cramer and Stebbins and told them who Cramer and Stebbins were, and then went to the two chairs still vacant, the two nearest my desk. Mrs. Irving took the one in front, with Judy between her and Mira, and her husband took the one in back of her, which put him only a long arm's length from Waldo Kearns.

As Wolfe's eyes moved from right to left, stopping at Mira, and back again, Cramer spoke. "You understand that this is not an official inquiry. Sergeant Stebbins and I are looking on. You also understand that Mira Holt is under arrest as a material witness. If she had been charged with murder she wouldn't be here."

"Why isn't she out on bail?" Judy Bram demanded. "I want to know why—"

"That will do," Wolfe snapped. "You're here to listen, Miss Bram, and if you don't hold your tongue Mr. Goodwin will drag you out. If necessary Mr. Stebbins will help."

"But why—"

"No! One more word and out you go."

She set her teeth on her lip and glared at him. He glared back, and decided she was squelched.

"I am acting," he said, "jointly with Mr. Goodwin, on behalf of Miss Holt. At our persuasion she has just told Mr. Cramer of her movements last evening. I'll sketch them briefly. Shortly after seven thirty she took Miss Bram's cab and drove it to Ferrell Street and parked at the mouth of the alley leading to Mr. Kearns's house. She expected him to appear but he didn't. At eight thirty she left the cab, went through the alley to the house, knocked several times, and looked in windows. Getting no response she returned to the cab, having been gone about ten minutes. There was a dead body in the cab, a woman, and she recognized her. It was Phoebe Arden. I will not—"

"You fat fool!" Judy blurted. "You're a fine—"

"Archie!" he commanded.

I stood up. She clamped her teeth on her lip. I sat down.

"I will not," Wolfe said, "go into her thought processes, but confine myself to her actions. She covered the body and drove away. Her intention was to dispose of her cargo in some likely spot, and she drove around in search of one, but found none. I omit details—for instance, that she rang the number of Miss Bram from a phone booth and got no answer. She decided she must have counsel, drove to my house, met Mr. Goodwin on the stoop,

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and gave him a rigmarole about a bet she had made. Since he is vulnerable to the attractions of personable young women, he swallowed it."

I swallowed *that*. I had to, with Cramer sitting there.

"Now," Wolfe said, "a crucial fact. I learned it myself less than three hours ago. Only a few minutes after Miss Holt and Mr. Goodwin met on the stoop someone phoned police headquarters to say that a taxi standing in front of this address had a dead woman in it. That is—"

"Where did you get that?" Cramer demanded.

Wolfe snorted. "Pfui. Not from you or Mr. Stebbins. That is proof, to me conclusive, that the murderer of Phoebe Arden had no wish or need for her to die. Phoebe Arden was killed only because her corpse was needed as a tool for the destruction of another person—a design so cold-blooded and malign that even I am impressed. Whether she was killed in the cab, or at a nearby spot and the body taken to the cab, is immaterial. The former is more likely, and I assume it.

"What did the murderer do? He entered the cab with Phoebe Arden the moment Miss Holt disappeared in the alley, coming from their hiding place in the stoneyard across the street. Having stabbed his victim—or rather his tool—he walked up Ferrell Street and around the corner to where his car was parked on Carmine Street. Before going to his car he stood near the corner to see if Miss Holt, on returning to the cab, removed the body before driving away. If she had, he would have found a booth and phoned police headquarters immediately."

Cramer growled, "What if Kearns had come out with Miss Holt?"

"He knew he wouldn't. I'll come to that. You are assuming that Kearns was not the murderer."

"I am assuming nothing."

"That's prudent. When Miss Holt turned the cab into Carmine Street and drove on, he followed her. He followed her throughout her search for a place to get rid of the corpse, and on to her final destination, this house. Some of my particulars are assumption or conjecture, but not this one. He must have done so, for when she stopped here he drove on by, found a phone booth, and made the call to the police. The only other possible source of the call was a passerby who had seen the corpse in the cab as it stood at the curb, and a passerby couldn't have seen it without opening the door and lifting the canvas." His eyes went to Cramer. "Of course that hadn't escaped you."

Cramer grunted.

Wolfe turned a hand over. "If his objective was the death of

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Phoebe Arden, why didn't he kill her in the stoneyard—they must have been there, since there is no other concealment near—and leave her there? Or if he did kill her there, which is unlikely, why did he carry or drag the body to the cab? And why, his objective reached, did he follow the cab in its wanderings and at the first opportunity call the police?

"I concede the possibility that he had a double objective, to destroy both Miss Arden and Miss Holt, but if so Miss Holt must have been his main target. To kill Miss Arden, once he had her in the stoneyard with a weapon at hand, was simple and involved little risk; to use her body as a tool for the destruction of Miss Holt was a complicated and daring operation, and the risks were great. I am convinced that he had a single objective—to destroy Miss Holt."

"Then why?" Cramer demanded. "Why didn't he kill *her*?"

"I can only conjecture, but it is based on logic. Because it was known that he had reason to wish Miss Holt dead, and no matter how ingenious his plan and adroit its execution, he would have been suspected and probably brought to account. I have misstated it. That's what he did. He devised a plan so ingenious that he thought he would be safe."

Purley Stebbins got up, circled around the red leather chair, and stood at Waldo Kearn's elbow.

"No, Mr. Stebbins," Wolfe said. "If you want to guard a murderer, stand by *Mrs.* Irving."

Knowing that was coming any second, I had my eye on her. She was only four feet from me. She didn't move a muscle, but her husband did. He put a hand to his forehead and squeezed. I could see his knuckles go white. Mira's eyes stayed fixed on Wolfe, but Judy and Kearns turned to look at Mrs. Irving. Stebbins did too, but he didn't move.

Cramer spoke. "Who is Mrs. Irving?"

"She is present, sir."

"I know she is. Who is she?"

"She is the wife of the man whom Miss Holt called on the phone Sunday evening to tell him that she was going to take Miss Bram's cab, and why. Mr. Irving has stated that he told no one of that call. Either he lied or his wife eavesdropped. Mr. Irving, might your wife have overheard that conversation on an extension?"

Irving's hand left his forehead. He lowered it slowly until it touched his knee. I had him in profile. A muscle at the side of his neck was twitching. "To say that she might," he said slowly and precisely, as if he only had so many words and didn't want to waste any, "isn't saying that she did. You have made a shocking accusation. I hope—" He

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stopped, leaving it to anybody's guess what he hoped. He blurted, "Ask her!"

"I shall. Did you, madam?"

"No." Her deep strong voice needed more breath behind it. "Your accusation is not only shocking, it's absurd. I told Mr. Goodwin what I did last evening. Hasn't he told you?"

"He has. You told him that your husband had been prevented by a business emergency from keeping a dinner and theater engagement with you, and you had phoned Phoebe Arden to go in his stead, and she agreed. When she didn't appear at the restaurant you rang her number and got no answer, and then went to another restaurant to eat alone, presumably one where you are not known and plausibly would not be remembered.

"After waiting for her at the theater until after nine o'clock you left a ticket for her at the box office and went in to your seat. That sounds impressive, but actually it leaves you free for the period that counts, from half-past seven until well after nine o'clock. Incidentally, it was a mistake to volunteer that account of your movements, so detailed and precise. When Mr. Goodwin reported it to me I marked you down as worthy of attention."

"I told Mr. Goodwin I wanted to help," she said.

"Don't talk," her husband commanded the back of her head. "Let him talk." To Wolfe: "Unless you're through?"

"By no means. I'll put it directly to you, madam. This is how you really spent those hours. You did phone Phoebe Arden yesterday afternoon, but not to ask her to join you at dinner and the theater. You told her of Miss Holt's plan to drive Miss Bram's cab in an effort to have a talk with her husband, and you proposed a prank. Miss Arden would arrange that Mr. Kearns would fail to appear, and if he didn't, Miss Holt would certainly leave the cab to go to his house to inquire. Whereupon you and Miss Arden, from your concealment in the neighboring stoneyard, would go and enter the cab, and when Miss Holt returned she would find you there, to her discomfiture and even consternation."

"You can't prove any of this," Cramer growled.

"No one ever can, since Miss Arden is dead." Wolfe's eyes didn't leave Mrs. Irving. He went on, "I didn't know Miss Arden, so I can't say whether she agreed to your proposal from mere caprice or from an animus for Miss Holt, but she did agree, and went to her doom. The program went as planned, without a hitch. No doubt Miss Arden herself devised the stratagem by which Mr. Kearns was removed from the scene. But at this point I

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must confess that my case is not flawless. Certainly you would not have been so witless as to let anyone have a hand in your deadly prank—either a cab driver or your private chauffeur. Do you drive a car?"

"Don't answer," Irving commanded her.

"Yes, she does," Judy Bram said, louder than necessary.

"Thank you, Miss Bram. Apparently you *can* speak to the point. Then you and Miss Arden went in your car, and parked it on Carmine Street—away from the corner in the direction Miss Holt would take when, leaving, she made the turn from Ferrell Street. You walked to the stoneyard and chose your hiding spot, and when Miss Holt left the cab you went and entered it. It is noteworthy that at that point you were committed to nothing but a prank. If Miss Holt had suddenly returned, or if anyone had come close enough to observe, you would merely have abandoned your true objective—a disappointment, but no disaster. As it was, you struck.

"I am not a moralizer, but I permit myself the comment that in my experience your performance is without parallel for ruthlessness and savagery. It appears that Miss Arden was no enemy of yours; she was your friend. She must have been, to join with you in your impish prank; but you needed her corpse for a tool to gratify your mortal hatred for Miss Holt. That was—"

"Her hatred for Miss Holt," Cramer said. "You assume that too?"

"No, indeed. That is established. Miss Bram, speaking of Gilbert Irving you said that when he looks at Miss Holt or hears her voice he has to lean against something to keep from trembling. You didn't specify the emotion that so affects him. Is it repugnance?"

"No. It's love. He wants her."

"Was his wife aware of it?"

"Yes. Lots of people were. You only had to see him look at her."

"That is not true," Irving said. "I am merely Miss Holt's friend, that's all, and I hope she is mine."

Judy's eyes darted at him and returned to Wolfe. "He's only being a husband because he thinks he has to. He's being a gentleman. A gentleman doesn't betray his wife. I was wrong about you. I shouldn't have called you a fat fool. I didn't know—"

Cramer cut in, to Wolfe. "All right, if that isn't established it can be. But it's all that's established. There's damn little you can prove. Do you expect me to charge a woman with murder on your guess?"

You don't often hear a sergeant disagree with an Inspector in public, but Purley Stebbins—no,

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I used the wrong word. Not hear, see. Purley didn't say a word. All he did was leave his post at Kearns's elbow and circle around Irving to stand beside Mrs. Irving, between her and Judy Bram. Probably it didn't occur to him that he was disagreeing with his superior; he merely didn't like the possibility of Mrs. Irving's getting a knife from her handbag and sticking it in Judy's ribs.

"There's nothing at all I can prove," Wolfe said. "I have merely exposed the naked truth; it is for you, not me, to drape it with the evidence the law requires. For that you are well equipped; surely you need no suggestions from me; but, item, did Mrs. Irving get her car from the garage yesterday evening? What for? If to drive to a restaurant and then to a theater, in itself unlikely, where did she park it? Item, the knife. If she conceived her prank only after her husband phoned to cancel their engagement, which is highly probable, she hadn't time to contrive an elaborate and prudent plan for getting a weapon. She either bought one at a convenient shop, or she took one from her own kitchen; and if the latter, her cook or maid will have missed it and can identify it. Her biggest mistake, of course, was leaving the knife in the body, even with the handle wiped clean; but she was in a hurry to leave, she was afraid blood would spurt on her, and she was confident that she would never be suspected of killing her good friend Phoebe Arden. Other items—"

Mrs. Irving was up, and as she arose her husband did too, and grabbed her arm from behind. He wasn't seizing a murderer; he was being a gentleman and stopping his wife from betraying herself. She jerked loose, but then Purley Stebbins had her other arm in his big paw.

"Take it easy," Purley said. "Just take it easy."

Mira's head dropped and her hands came up to cover her face, and she started to shake. Judy Bram put a hand on her shoulder and said, "Go right ahead, Mi, don't mind us." Waldo Kearns was sitting still, perfectly still. I got up and went to the kitchen, to the extension, and dialed the *Gazette* number. I thought I ought to be as good at keeping a promise as Mira had been.

Yesterday I drove Mira and Judy to Idlewild, where Mira was to board a plane for Reno. Judy and I had tossed a coin to decide whether the trip would be made in the Heron sedan which Wolfe owns and I drive, or in Judy's cab, and I had won. On the way back I remarked that I supposed Kearns had agreed to accept service for a Reno divorce because now it wouldn't leave him free

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to marry Phoebe Arden.

"No," Judy said. "Because his wife was a witness in a murder trial and that wouldn't do."

A little later I remarked that I supposed she had stopped dreaming about a lion standing on a rock about to spring at her.

"No," she said. "Only now I'm not sure who it is. It could even be you."

A little later I remarked that if the state of New York carried out its program for Mrs. Irving, who was in the death house at Sing Sing. I supposed Mira would get back from Reno just in time for a wedding.

"No," Judy said. "They'll wait at least a year. Gil Irving will always be a gentleman."

Three supposes and all wrong. And still men keep on marrying women.

'Q'

NEXT MONTH ...

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Well, as usual, Inspector Charly Moitt of Homicide has his little ax to grind, and as usual it lands him smack in the middle of a murder case. Charly can always steer the dangerous course between the Scylla of official duty and the Charybdis of personal gain (except that he probably never heard of Scylla and Charybdis—rock 'n' rollers?), and sometimes he even manages to come up roses . . .

F AS IN FRAUD

by WALTER CANTREE

IT WAS A CHILLY NOVEMBER day, which is what made Inspector Charly Moitt remember the storm windows. He was in this part of town because his chief, Lieutenant Rick Bedell of Homicide, had sent him there on a routine assignment, and he was in no hurry to get back to headquarters and maybe get sent out to do some more work. So he figured he could stall a little by dropping in on the Hypon Storm Window Company, and the Lieutenant would never be the wiser.

What had happened was, about a month ago he'd caught a holdup artist plying his trade, and the would-be victim, Dinnon McCafee, turned out to be head and chief salesman of this storm-window outfit. As luck would have it, Charly and his wife May had just been telling each other they'd *have* to do something about storm windows before another winter.

In his gratitude McCafee had offered to get him some good seconds." Well, maybe not "offered" exactly, but he'd responded to a hint or two. Winter wasn't getting any further off, so today seemed like a fine time to see him and square away the details of installation and so forth, Charly being in this part of town and in no hurry to get back and all.

He parked right in front of the dingy storefront, and as he got to the doorway he almost collided with a man in a plaid raincoat coming out. The man looked pretty mad, and was in such a rush he stepped on Charly's foot.

"Hey, watch it!" Charly said gruffly, but the other man just growled and brushed past.

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"Now, what's bugging him!" Charly wondered as he went inside. There was no one in the little office, and after hanging around a few minutes in hopes McCafee would show up, Charly left. He was about to get back in his car when he noticed the diner next door. He was cold, and he still wasn't too anxious to get back to headquarters, so he decided to have a cup of coffee first.

Which was how he happened to discover that the guy who'd just stepped on his foot had already gotten himself murdered.

He didn't find out right away, though. He perched himself on a stool up by the front, ordered a cup of coffee and a cheese Danish, and made conversation with the burly ruddy-faced counterman.

It was when he was on his way to the Men's Room that he spotted the fellow, scrunched into a booth way in the rear. He recognized the plaid raincoat right away, and, remembering how mad he'd been, said as he started to go past, "Feeling better?"

Something about the no-answer and a much-too-complete stillness stopped him and he bent down. Then he straightened the man up and whistled. There was a neat bullet hole in the man's chest, and powder marks all around it. The guy was, without question, dead.

"Hey, Mac!" he called up front. "Where's the phone?"

Then he called Lieutenant Bedell, and felt better knowing the Lieutenant and the fellows were on their way. He tramped back up front, his mind working. This guy hadn't had much time to get himself killed—say, about five minutes. What luck he'd been around, practically a witness. He didn't think the Leiutenant would make too much of a point wondering how he happened to be there.

Charly climbed back on his stool and took a swig of coffee. "What's your name, Mac?" he said to the counterman.

"What's it to ya?" came the surly response. "What's up, buddy?"

"As if you didn't know." He put a snarl into it. He figured he might as well get tough—how could the counterman help hearing the shot in this little place? Why, the guy *had* to be a witness.

Only he wasn't. When he found out he was talking to Inspector Moitt of Homicide, he got a lot more respectful and said his name was Gruenn. But what he could tell Charly wasn't what Charly had hoped for at all.

Gruenn said the fellow in the raincoat had come in alone, looking mad, and ordered coffee. Charly himself could vouch for his being mad. Gruenn also thought that someone else had come in the back way, from the

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parking lot, and sat in the booth, because he'd heard voices, but he hadn't gotten a good look. Instead, after waiting to make sure the second guy wasn't going to order, Gruenn had stepped out of the diner himself.

"Just for a minute," he explained. "I had a message for the people in the store next door."

"Yeah?" Charly wasn't going to let him get away with that. "I was over there myself."

"You got me wrong, Inspector. I went through the back way."

"Well, why didn't you say so?" Charly was extra-gruff, because he should have thought of that himself. But then he thought of something else.

"So how come you didn't get a look at the second man?"

"You can see how high those booths are. I just wasn't looking their way. Matter of fact, once I was on my way out I didn't want the other guy to get any ideas about ordering till I got back, so I sort of avoided letting 'em catch my eye."

Charly nodded, and then Bedell was there, along with Ken Badley and some of the others, and he was glad to have the Lieutenant take over, and not be carrying all the responsibility himself any more. Not that he couldn't if he had to, but there was something reassuring about the Lieutenant, and about being part of this particular team.

Charly filled the Lieutenant in quickly. While he'd been questioning Gruenn, part of his mind had been working on what to tell Bedell. Charly figured he'd better say the guy had been to the storm-window place because it might make a difference; you never knew what was important. But the Lieutenant didn't have to hear that Charly had been there too.

So he just told him he'd stopped for a cup of coffee, and had seen the guy leave the one place and go to the other. Then he said he'd browsed in the shop windows a few minutes before going in for his coffee. From that part on it was a straight report.

When he finished they went to take a more careful look at the victim. He was a good-looking man, about 35, and he didn't look mad any more, just surprised, kind of. There was a gold band on the fourth finger of his left hand, and the Lieutenant shook his head. "Someone'll have to tell the wife, and find out what she knows. Find a name and address?"

Charly got the guy's wallet and came up with V. Michetti, and an address on the outskirts of town. Bedell sent him and Ken Badley to check it out.

The Michettis lived in one of those new housing developments that leave a lot of finishing to the proud owners. Mrs. Michetti was kind of pretty, with a nice

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husky voice. She was wearing a miniskirt, and that got Charly trying to picture May in one, but he gave it up.

They couldn't really tell how she took the news about her husband. She didn't go to pieces, that was for sure, but it could have been s h o c k — o r indifference. Unless, of course, it was no news at all. She had no explanations, and no ideas.

"I see you don't have any storm windows," Charly observed, and Badley gave him a surprised look. But Badley hadn't seen Michetti coming out of the Hypon Storm Window Company, and Charly had.

"We're getting some." Mrs. Michetti looked as surprised as Badley. "Ordered them ages ago."

Charly nodded, and he and Ken took off for headquarters. On the way to the squad room they saw a skinny guy sitting on a bench.

"Hey, McCafee!" C h a r l y greeted him. "I was at your place today."

"Yeah, I know," the other said sourly. "Otherwise I wouldn't be here now.

"Don't mind me," McCafee added more amiably, making an effort to be pleasant, "but it's my busy time, and I don't know anything about all this. Put in a good word for me, will ya?"

"Sure," said Charly, and went on. But just because a guy's being robbed doesn't make him honest, and what else did he know about him when he came right down to it?

The next few days Charly was kept pretty busy checking out various points of the case. The wife wasn't cleared, exactly, but they couldn't exactly pin anything on her either. She might have been running a r o u n d — b u t they couldn't find out for sure. And why would she come to an out-of-the-way part of town to meet her husband in a diner? It just didn't add up.

One thing, though, the counterman didn't insist that the voices he'd heard had both been men's, though he'd thought so at the time. He said one could have been a husky-voiced woman. A n d where could they go with that?

"There is also," Lieutenant Bedell pointed out in a session with the squad, "the s t o r m - window angle. I never heard of a store owner shooting h i s customer because the customer got impatient, but it's funny how McCafee can't account for his time. If he were out selling, you'd think a customer could alibi him. He *says* he was working on his order book—on a park bench in November! Ken, what did you get out of McCafee's clerk?"

"Chic Campolete?" B a d l e y looked thoughtful. "I'd say that guy was scared. I never saw anyone unhappier-looking. Kept saying he was just a clerk, and

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knew nothing about the storm-window business. I'd say he knows something, though, and it wouldn't be too hard to get it out of him. He confirms what Gruenn the counterman says, that he was in the back talking to him just before our boy here discovered the murder."

Charly had been thinking over his first contact with McCafee, and now he spoke up, carefully refraining from mentioning how he'd got his idea. It still wasn't going to hurt the case to keep his connection with the Hypon Storm Window Company out of it.

"Lieutenant, maybe it would help to check with police headquarters in some other cities." He explained what he had in mind, and Bedell looked interested.

"Okay, boys, that's all for now. Let's see how Charly's suggestion pans out. It could explain a lot."

The next several hours Charly had domestic matters on his mind. If he was right, he really had problems.

Then Bedell came up to him, and he was grinning. "You hit it, Charly, right on the nose. I wonder what gave you the idea." He looked at him thoughtfully, but didn't pursue the subject. "The Hypon Storm Window Company is nothing but a confidence racket—we've heard from Rochester so far, and McCafee worked the same thing there; takes orders with fat deposits down, and when he's collected enough, he blows. Michetti was getting too suspicious, and got killed for it. We've got the murderer too."

"You got McCafee?" Charly asked.

"Well, we got him on fraud charges, but he didn't kill Michetti."

He led the way into his office where Gruenn was sitting there looking surlier than ever.

"Campolete cracked and told us all we wanted to know. Gruenn the counterman had caught on to the illegality of the activities next door, and was into McCafee for a piece of it. He was too greedy to give up a good thing; Michetti in all innocence told him he was going to have McCafee investigated, and Gruenn didn't wait to hear more. He shot him on the spot and ran to Campolete to alibi him. The two of them were in the back of the shop, all right, while Gruenn convinced Campolete he'd not only have to keep quiet but alibi him besides. Campolete was McCafee's accomplice—but murder was too much for him."

Charly was pleased that he'd thought of the main part of it—that the whole thing might be a racket. On thinking it over, he'd realized that McCafee had been pretty reluctant to offer him that particular favor. It might even be,

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Charly had concluded later, that he'd promised him "seconds" only to get rid of him. If he was running a racket, he wouldn't want a persistent cop around, and Charly could be pretty persistent.

"The funny thing is," Bedell said, "if this was a case with a brainy amateur detective I'd say Gruenn's name had something to do with it, but we don't go in for that kind of fancy stuff."

But Charly wasn't really listening. He was thinking that here it was November and they didn't even have storm windows on order. May wasn't going to like that at all.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It took all the restraint I could muster not to call this one *A As in Anagram.* I compromised with the title I did use. For what Bedell meant, of course, was that the letters in Gruenn's name anagram to "gunner." In fact, anagram aficionados were no doubt way ahead of Charly and Lieutenant Bedell on the solution of the case; the names gave it away all along the line. For example:

Hypon Storm Window Company = Phony Storm Window Company
Dinnon McCafee = confidence man
V. Michetti = the victim
Chic Campolete = the accomplice

I'm sure that readers of EQMM had no trouble recognizing the police procedural series on which this is a take-off, featuring:

(Inspector) Charly Moitt = (Inspector) Mitch Taylor
(Lieutenant) Rick Bedell = (Lieutenant) Bill Decker
Ken Badley = Ed Balenky
(Charly's wife) May = (Mitch's wife) Amy

And finally, the author of this fine series — Walter Cantree — anagrams to Mr. Police Procedural himself — Lawrence Treat.

NORMA SCHIER

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a *NEW* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Well, as usual, Inspector Mitch Taylor is minding his own business, and his wife Amy's—and on his day off yet!—when, as usual, he lands smack in the middle of a murder case. But, as Mitch put it, Fate always kicked him up and then kicked him down. Here he runs into a homicide, and instead of something real simple that could end up winning him a citation, it turns out to be a lulu, with a crooked art dealer, an assistant museum director, and a red-headed secretary, and how to pin it on one of them . . . Another of Lawrence Treat's realistic, down-to-earth, tell-it-like-it-is, everyday-kind-of police procedurals . . .

F AS IN FAKE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

INSPECTOR MITCH TAYLOR, Homicide Squad, didn't exactly hang out in art museums for the fun of it—leastways, not on his day off. Still, when Amy wanted to go—on account she'd studied up on that kind of thing—what was Mitch supposed to do? Walk out on her or something?

It worked out all right, though, because he'd hardly got inside the place when he spotted Clancy. Here he was a museum guard, wearing a natty uniform with a blue shirt, and even without the jacket on you could see the uniform was made to order—none of the cheap stuff the department got you a bargain on. Clancy had been up in the Sixth until a few years ago, when he'd retired, so him and Mitch chewed the rag a little and talked about old times, which was mostly about Perrini who'd been in command of the Sixth and how he loved the green stuff.

Clancy didn't sound particularly sour on him, although Mitch happened to know a couple of things. Namely how Clancy had been in trouble because he used to collect

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plenty on the side and keep it for himself; so when Clancy was ready to quit, Perrini cracked down on him and wanted his piece of the take.

Mitch had no idea what Clancy's payoff to Perrini had been, and he didn't ask. The thing was, Clancy got by with his pension, and that was what counted. The way he put it, things were okay now. He admitted that his dogs got to hurt him before he even went to lunch; still, like he said, you got to give up something to get a new car and have the mortgage all paid up.

Mitch said sure, that was the way things were. Then they got to talking some more and Clancy told how his chief job here was to stop people from touching the paintings or from making too much noise. But every once in a while he had some real police work, like this series of petty thefts that had him buffaloed right now. It seemed that the museum director kept anywheres up to a few hundred dollars in petty cash in his desk drawer, and you couldn't make him lock it up, even when it was disappearing regular as clockwork.

"Probably takes it himself," Mitch said, "and then claims it was stolen."

"I dunno," Clancy said. "I got a line on one of the girls in his office. A wing-wang of a redhead, too."

"Yeah," Mitch said vaguely, not committing himself.

Clancy looked like Mitch had let him down by not figuring out on the spot who was taking the stuff, but what was Mitch supposed to do, anyhow? Then Clancy said he better look in on some of the other rooms—you never knew what people were up to. So Mitch said goodbye and he'd be sure to tell the boys he'd run into Clancy and how the ex-cop was making out all right, and then Mitch went looking for Amy.

He found her standing in front of some red and white stripes with half a frame around them, and she was all excited.

"Mitchell," she said, "they hung it upside down!"

Mitch stared at the thing. "Yeah?" he said. "How can you tell?"

"The signature," she said. "I was reading an article the other day. It said the signature should always be part of the picture, but it should be put in so subtly that nobody notices. And there it is—see? H. MOSS—H. for Herman. Upside down in the upper right-hand corner."

Mitch saw it all right, a kind of a scrawl that you could hardly make out, but there it was. H. MOSS, looking like SSOW .H.

"I'd better tell them," Amy said.

"What for?" Mitch said. "It looks good enough this way, if

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you ask me. Nobody noticed it was wrong, so why make trouble? Whoever's in charge, you'll just make him feel like a jackass, and what for?"

"But it's wrong!" Amy said.

"Maybe the artist made the mistake," Mitch said, and that made Amy look at him like she obviously knew more about art than he did—which she did.

They walked around a little more and Amy explained some of the things she'd studied up on, and after a while it was time for lunch, so they went downstairs to the cafeteria, only it wasn't a cafeteria on account they had waitresses there.

Because Mitch had this habit of noticing people, he looked around to see who was there. Maybe for the next day or so he could have described practically everybody, and as it turned out, he had to. Still, what hit him in the eye was the way this big gook with the slicked-down hair kept staring at Amy. Not that she wasn't easy to look at. She wasn't Hollywood, maybe, but she had a face and a figure that would have been Hollywood if they'd had any sense out there.

Anyhow, this guy leered at Amy like she was wearing a bikini. And since the only empty table was right next to his, Amy went there and sat down, which this guy seemed to think she did on account he had some strange power over dames and they just couldn't help falling all over themselves to be near him.

Mitch sat down with his back to the guy, and he could see Amy was a little upset. To make things worse, the guy started talking to them. He asked what time it was, which turned out to be 12:20. With that for openers he said his name was Pepe Santiago and he collected paintings and knew everybody important in the art world and would be glad to introduce them and show them around. Except when he said "them," what he really meant was Amy. Then he went and called her Señora and said she was beautiful.

Most times Mitch would pass off stuff like that, it wouldn't bother him. Him and Amy, they were right for each other and he didn't have to worry about some slick-head coming along and shooting off his mouth. But this guy rubbed him the wrong way, and Mitch sat there and ate corned beef and cabbage that you could better use to shoot test bullets into, instead of putting it on a plate and charging real dough for it. And while he tried to chew on the stuff he kept thinking how he could get this Pepe.

Maybe he'd see Pepe outside and could charge him with loitering or littering. You could always figure out something. And if the guy went upstairs, Mitch could

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point him out to Clancy and let Clancy take care of him. Because there were ways, there's always ways. And then in the middle of it Mitch asked himself why in hell he was working up a grudge like this. What for, huh?

That was when Mitch realized that Pepe was telling Amy she ought to report all about the picture hanging upside down, and Pepe was briefing her on how to do it. The name of the museum director was Albert Van Vleet and his office was on the second floor and he usually came back from lunch around 1:00, which it almost was now, and if Amy had any trouble getting to see him, just say Pepe sent her. Pepe Santiago—everybody knew Pepe.

Then Pepe left, and Amy gave Mitch one of those smiles of hers and he felt a lot better, and by the time he asked for his check everything was okay again. Except the waitress told him there was no check on account the gentleman at the next table had paid it.

That made Mitch sore all over again, because nobody was going to pay for Amy's lunch except him. And certainly no slick-haired slob who went around trying to make goo-goo eyes at Amy.

After that Mitch and Amy went upstairs and they found the director's office. In the outer room there was this well-dressed guy sitting at a corner desk and a couple of females typing away and making like they were busy. Mitch had noticed them down in the cafeteria, at a table along the wall. One of them was the redhead that Clancy thought was dipping into the petty cash. The other one was a blonde, and she got up and said she didn't think Mr. Van Vleet had come back from lunch yet, but she'd find out.

She pushed a button and said, speaking into the intercom, "Mr. Van Vleet? Mr. Van Vleet?" When there was no answer she turned to Amy and said, "What is it you wished to see him about? Maybe I can help."

Amy told her, and this female looked shocked and said, "Oh, I hope you're wrong. I'd better leave a note on his desk. He'll be so upset."

She scrawled something and got up, but while she was doing it, the smooth-looking guy over at the corner desk let loose. "Doesn't surprise me at all," he said. "He knows nothing about modern art. Nothing."

The other secretary, the redhead, said, "But Mr. Flood—you didn't notice, either."

"How could I?" Flood said. "I was out of town all week, trying to trace some of the paintings Santiago unloaded. *I* didn't hang the exhibit."

That was when the blonde secretary opened the door to Van Vleet's office and let out a

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scream. "Oh! Look!"

Mitch whipped past her and stopped in the doorway. What he saw inside there—the place looked more like a living room than an office—was this guy stretched out on the floor. He was around 50 years old, heavy-set, with black hair and long thick sideburns. He had blood on his temples and both sides of his skull were caved in. On the floor next to him was this bronze statue of a female, maybe eighteen inches high, and she was holding a busted spear and she had armor around her middle, and it was a pretty good guess this was the weapon.

Mitch felt someone breathing down his neck, and he turned around and here was this smootho from the outer office.

"Who is he?" Mitch asked.

The guy and the secretary both answered at the same time. "It's Mr. Van Vleet."

"Okay," Mitch said. He took out his ID and showed it. "I'm Taylor, Homicide. You—" and he pointed to the girl. "Know Clancy, the museum guard?" She nodded and he said, "Get hold of him and bring him here." Then Mitch turned to the smootho. "Who are you?" Mitch asked.

"I'm Kirk Flood."

"What do you do?"

"I am the assistant director."

"Okay. Just stay out of this room for a while. I want to look things over."

Flood moved back, and Mitch saw Amy standing near him trying not to look at the thing on the floor. Mitch said to her, "No sense your sticking around, Amy. Better go on home."

"Home?" she said, sort of surprised. "But I wouldn't leave for anything. And maybe I can help."

"Maybe you can at that," Mitch said. "Try and locate this Pepe guy and tell him I want to see him in here. And watch out for yourself—be careful."

"He couldn't hurt me," Amy said, kind of getting her dander up. "He wouldn't dare!"

Mitch watched her go, then scratched his head, turned around, and got down to business. The thing was, you had to see what was here and nail it down in your mind; so he planted himself spraddle-legged and let his eyes move up and down the room, methodically, in a kind of gridiron pattern.

He saw plenty, and some of it wasn't legit. First of all, there was the door right here, which was a foot thick and lined with some sort of quilting. The ceiling had that acoustical stuff, too, which meant the whole room was soundproofed, and what for? Then Mitch spotted another door on the other side of the room, so he crossed over and gave the door a push. It opened onto a corridor, which meant that anybody who knew his way around, or maybe

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just happened to come down that corridor, could walk in here and make all the noise he wanted to and then walk out—and nobody outside the room would hear a sound.

He came back and did some more looking. The radio-clock cord had been yanked out of its socket and the clock said 12:27, which was when he and Amy had been talking to Pepe in the cafeteria.

Pepe, huh?

The rest of the room looked normal, more or less. The only sign of a fight was the desk chair which had been knocked over, and maybe Van Vleet had fallen out of it and maybe it had been knocked over on purpose, after Van Vleet was dead.

Mitch took a deep breath. Usually he went at things slow, on account the faster he worked the more jobs they gave him. And since nobody was paying him by the job, why hurry?

But this was different. Here he had his day off, and him and Amy had figured they'd have it all to themselves before they had to go back to the kids, and what happened? He walked right into a case, and the only way he could get out of it was by cracking it fast. And wouldn't it be something if Pepe turned out to be the killer and Mitch could hand him over to the lieutenant when Decker walked in?

Only it wouldn't happen that way. Not with Mitch. Instead, the Chronicle would run some smart-aleck story about how a homicide dick was right there in the museum and was having lunch with the killer, and what did this dick do? He let the killer pay for his lunch!

Yeah, that's how they'd write it up, so why play it any different? Still, with a trained cop like Clancy right here to handle the details for him—to notify the homicide squad and clear the outer office and keep the crowd away—Mitch might as well get down to the business of interrogating.

He started off with Kirk Flood. "What was the fight about?" Mitch asked.

"What fight?"

"You and him. Right here."

"I had no fight with him," Kirk said, speaking slow, like he had to push hard on every word before he could get it out.

"When did you see him last?"

"A little before ten this morning. I'd been away, tracking down some paintings of doubtful origin—"

"Sold by Pepe Santiago?" Mitch said.

Kirk kind of stuttered before he could manage a plain ordinary yes.

"Tell me some more about this character Pepe," Mitch said.

Kirk answered in that slow voice of his, like he was afraid

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they'd sue him for libel if he didn't watch every word. "He has a bad reputation. He handled pictures of dubious authenticity. We have a file on him, Mr. Taylor. Perhaps you wish to consult it."

"Later," Mitch said, because he'd learned the important thing, which was Pepe's motive. "Right now I want to know who went in to see Van Vleet this morning."

"No one came through the outer office," Kirk said. "As to who came in from that corridor, I do not know."

"Where were you at about twelve thirty?" Mitch asked.

Kirk took a long time to answer that one. "I was walking. I went out."

"For lunch?"

"I had no lunch."

"What did you skip it for?"

That really got him, and he just about whispered out his answer. "I was not hungry."

"Okay," Mitch said. What he knew now was, Kirk had probably had a fight with Van Vleet over Van Vleet's purchase of stuff from Santiago, and Kirk had skipped lunch for some reason, which was either because he'd killed Van Vleet or else because he knew Van Vleet was dead. So Mitch said, "Okay. Now about this room—why was it soundproofed?"

"Van Vleet liked to play rock-and-roll, and play it loud. It disturbed us in the outside room, and besides, it wasn't dignified." Kirk let out a smile and began to talk normal again. He must have figured he was out of the woods and didn't have to worry any more. "Museum directors," he said, "are supposed to impress people with their importance, and rock-and-roll is hardly the way to do it."

"You know about those thefts that were going on," Mitch said. "Where did Van Vleet keep his petty cash?"

That scared Kirk again, and his voice slowed up the same as before. "I'm told," he said, hedging, "that he kept it in an unlocked drawer."

Mitch let that ride. "This redhead who works here," he said. "What's her name?"

"Ethel Edwards."

"Friend of yours?"

"More of an acquaintance."

That just about finished up with Kirk Flood, so Mitch looked outside to where he could see Clancy talking to Pepe. Mitch yelled to send in Pepe.

He arrived beaming, like it was Mitch's birthday and here was a new watch he was giving him. "Mr. Taylor," he said, and he spoke English so good that most of the time you hardly noticed his accent. "Your beautiful señora said you wished to see me. Something has happened and no doubt you need my help. I am at your service."

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"Something happened all right," Mitch said. "Take a look." And he brought Pepe far enough into the room to see.

Pepe took it like he was onstage. "Is he sick?" he said.

"He's sick," Mitch said. "What did you kill him for?"

Pepe backed all the way up to the door. "Pardon?" he said.

Mitch let him have it all at once, both barrels. "You heard me," he said. "You came in through the corridor door and you had an argument with him about some pictures you'd unloaded on him. They were fakes and he had the goods on you and you couldn't squirm out of it, so you let him have it with that bronze statue. Then you yanked out the radio cord, set the clock for twelve twenty-seven, and left. You went straight down to the cafeteria and deliberately got into a conversation with me and the wife, setting up your alibi. You made sure I noticed the time, and you paid my bill so I'd remember you. It's all pretty clear."

"You joke," Pepe said, but he was one worried hombre.

"Think so?" Mitch said.

"But the clock!" Pepe said. "At twelve twenty-seven I was in the cafeteria, talking to you."

"I didn't see you," Mitch said.

"But the waitress!"

"What waitress?" Mitch said. "There ain't no waitress. I took care of that."

That shook Pepe, and he just stared at Mitch open-mouthed. Maybe he thought Mitch would really frame him or maybe he saw through the bluff. Mitch didn't give him time to think.

"That's the way things stand," Mitch said. "Everybody out there in the office knows Van Vleet had a file on you. You palmed off some fakes on him and you came to the museum to square it somehow, only he was sore and threatened to prosecute."

Pepe's mouth tightened and his face went white. He drew in his breath and started to make a break for the door, but Mitch got hold of his arm and twisted it around his back. Pepe let out a yelp, and Mitch wrestled him down into a chair. He sank back in it, and all the fight, like air out of a balloon, wheezed out of him. He just stayed there when Mitch let go.

"Hey, Clancy," Mitch called out, "come in here and watch this guy."

While Pepe didn't exactly confess, things looked pretty cut and dried. What would happen would be, they'd bring him down to headquarters and they'd interrogate him in relays, and he'd break around midnight. After that Mitch could go home, but he'd get tomorrow off and he'd spend it with Amy. And this time they wouldn't go to any museum, you could bet on it.

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Mitch had time to question the red-headed secretary, and he concentrated on the thefts from Van Vleet's desk. But all Mitch got out of her was that Van Vleet no longer kept large sums in there. She knew he'd had a total of $1.89 this morning. She'd seen it and even noticed that the dollar bill was torn and had been repaired with a strip of yellow tape. Mitch looked in the drawer now, and the petty cash was gone.

A little after that the police machine began to roll in, all the way from the Commissioner down to a bunch of extra patrolmen from the local precinct. Mitch gave the Commissioner a formal report, but he let his hair down with Lieutenant William Decker, who was head of Homicide and Mitch's boss. Mitch told him everything, even how Pepe had paid for lunch.

"Then there's no real evidence to connect Santiago with the actual homicide," Decker said.

"That's right. He's in this up to his eyeballs, I'm sure of it, but I can't prove it. But, Chief, if I can locate that torn dollar bill and prove that Pepe took it—"

"How would you do that?"

"Santiago maybe spent it on my lunch," Mitch said. "It cost a buck ninety-eight, which means he was only out nine cents."

"Worth looking into," Decker admitted. Then, when Mitch started to go, Decker said, "Wait a second. Maybe Van Vleet has it. Wait till we have a chance to search the body."

It took maybe a half hour to dust the desk and the rest of the room for prints, which there weren't any that shouldn't be there, and to look through the folder on Pepe. It had a list of paintings, but the marks alongside them were in code, and while Flood fell all over himself explaining that they proved Pepe was a crook and a bunch of other things, they had only Flood's word for it.

What it came down to was that Pepe had either entered through the corridor door, had an argument with Van Vleet, killed him, set the clock, and then come down to the restaurant to establish his alibi; or else, instead of having the argument and killing Van Vleet, Pepe had walked in on a dead body and realizing he'd be accused, had set the clock and then established his alibi. Right now you couldn't tell which theory was right.

Around then the Medical Examminer released the body and the Lieutenant looked into all of Van Vleet's pockets, and they were empty. Decker had already checked with Mrs. Van Vleet on the phone as to how much dough her husband had with him this morning, and she said he usually carried about $50 or so. With

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that information Decker told Mitch to go ahead and chase that torn dollar bill that had been in Van Vleet's desk this morning.

Mitch was glad to get out from under. Here he'd had the whole responsibility of the case right from the start, but now it was Decker's. The way the eight-man Homicide Squad worked was, Decker took charge of a case and gave out the assignments, so everything funneled through him. Now Mitch's worries were over; all he had to do was check on that $1.89, which was a simple job with plenty of time to do it in. He told Amy what had happened, then he took her out through the police lines and put her on the bus, and then went back into the museum.

The restaurant was jammed on account the word had got out that the director of the museum had been murdered, so everybody and his kid brother and sister came rushing over and wanted to either look at the body or else eat, so they could tell their friends they'd been right there in the museum on the day it happened.

Mitch couldn't spot the waitress who'd served him lunch, and the ones that were here, they were so busy they didn't know what they were doing. When he asked about this other waitress they said she'd probably got off at two, some of them did, and he could try the dressing rooms.

The directions Mitch got were kind of mixed up, and he took the wrong turn somewheres and landed in the men's locker room. There were maybe a dozen lockers there, along with the lavatory facilities, and there was a soft drink machine over in the corner, which made Mitch realize he was thirsty. Since he had only one nickel and no dimes in change, he had a little problem, and he sat down on a bench to try to figure it out.

It was the kind of thing he was always up against. Fate, if you wanted to call it that, kicked him up and then kicked him down. Like today, here he was in a museum, on his day off, and he runs into a homicide. And instead of something real simple that could drop in his lap and end up getting him a citation, it gets all messed up. Between a crooked art dealer who reset a clock, an assistant curator who skipped lunch, and a red-headed secretary who could count out eighty-nine cents in change lying in a drawer, what was he supposed to do?

For maybe half a minute he felt sorry for himself, and then he realized that this grudge of his against Pepe had got in the way of seeing a whole bunch of stuff that was right there in front of his eyes.

First of all, to do Pepe justice he wasn't the kind of guy to go

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after $1.89, because the one thing Pepe wasn't, he wasn't cheap. And the next thing Mitch couldn't see was Pepe searching a dead body in the hope of getting a few bucks out of it.

Cops sometimes did that, and Mitch thought of all the times when there was a drunk or a body somewheres, and the first thing that the first cop on the scene did was, he looked for some dough and kept it. Or most of it, anyhow, because it didn't look right when the body had nothing on him and all the relatives started screaming that there had to be dough somewheres, so who took it?

Mitch didn't have to do much thinking after that. Clancy was a cop, or an ex-cop. Clancy knew his way around. Clancy had been working on those petty thefts, and remembering his record, who was more likely to have itchy fingers than Clancy himself?

One of the lockers here had a label that read *M. C. Clancy*. It had a padlock on it, but one of those cheap ones you could usually bust open easy. There was a hammer and a screwdriver lying on a bench near the door—somebody had been repairing something—so Mitch picked up the hammer and gave the lock a couple of bangs.

The lock came apart without any trouble. Mitch put the hammer back, reached inside the locker, and found the bloodstained shirt. There weren't a lot of stains, but they were on the cuff and Mitch knew blood when he saw it. Just to be sure, he took the shirt over to where there was a good light, near a sink. He was examining the shirt when he heard the door open. He turned around as Clancy came in.

Clancy stopped short. You could tell that he caught on to what was happening, tried not to believe it, then saw he couldn't duck it. Van Vleet probably accused Clancy of those desk-drawer thefts, and in the argument they must have had over it, Clancy had picked up the statue and hit the director a couple of times and killed him. Afterwards Clancy must have noticed the blood on his shirt and come down here and changed it.

Clancy had figured if he acted normal he could walk out of here with that shirt folded up under his arm, so nobody would notice it, and once he got rid of the shirt he'd be home free. He'd maybe seen Pepe go in the office right after Van Vleet was killed. Maybe Clancy thought he was in luck on account of Pepe being in there and stopping the clock and resetting it; but now Clancy's luck had run out.

What he did now was, he picked up the hammer that was on the bench right near him and he started walking towards Mitch.

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And this being Mitch's day off, he had no gun on him. All he could hope to do was talk himself out of this.

"Put that thing down," Mitch said. "You know better than that."

"That shirt," Clancy said. "Give it here."

"Then what?"

"Give it here," Clancy said again. He lifted the hammer and kept on walking towards Mitch, going real slow. Mitch threw the shirt at him.

"It's your shirt," Mitch said. "You can have it for all I give a damn."

Clancy caught it in his free hand, and he lowered the hammer a little but kept his arm cocked. "Nothing against you," he said, "but you know how it is."

"Now wait a minute," Mitch said. "You don't know what you're doing."

"Okay," Clancy said. "Tell me. Tell me how I can get out of this, with you around."

"Self-defense," Mitch said promptly "You go ahead and admit you killed Van Vleet over those petty-cash larcenies, but you say the killing was self-defense. All you get charged with is larceny, so you sell your car, pay back the dough you took, and you get a suspended sentence."

"Why would I think *you'll* shut up?"

"Look," Mitch said. "You know what happens to a cop killer. And you know you'd be the first guy they'd go after, don't you?"

"Nobody's even going to dream I did it," Clancy said. "There's a porter around here by the name of George. He's got the locker next to mine, and he wears the same size shirt as me. I can hang this on him—I got it all figured out."

"How?"

"Never mind how," Clancy said. "He's due down here in five minutes, so I can't horse around any more." And he raised the hammer and kind of squinted, like he was taking aim.

You get in a corner like this, you got to time things exactly right and make a feint one way and then throw yourself the other way, and you hope they're going to miss the target. Maybe you get crippled and maybe you don't, but they're off-balance and you got some kind of a chance.

Only Mitch never made a move, because he saw the door open and Balenky and Bankhart, Homicide, came in. They both yanked out their guns and they both spoke at practically the same time.

"Drop it, Clancy."

Clancy swung around, saw the guns, and dropped the hammer. Mitch took a deep breath, then he walked past Clancy and over to a bench where he sat down,

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hard. What do you say when a couple of your sidekicks have just saved your life?

Mitch had the words almost on the end of his tongue, and then it occurred to him that they hadn't timed this; they'd come down for some other reason. So Mitch changed his mind about how he owed them his life.

He watched them put the bracelets on Clancy, and they weren't too gentle about it, either. Then Mitch spoke up.

"What the hell brought you guys down here?" he asked.

Balenky answered. "You know what detectives do," he said, real sarcastic. "They ask questions. The trick is to ask the right guy the right questions, so we asked a porter named George if he'd seen anybody in that corridor behind Van Vleet's office at twelve or so. He said sure, he saw Clancy."

"That's why you came down here?" Mitch said. "Looking for Clancy?"

Bankhart answered that one. "Sure," he said. "Some cases are real simple."

CRIMINALIMERICK

T AS IN TREAT

by D. R. BENSEN

"If it's something for nothing, why not?"
Says Mitch Taylor (who's not paid a lot);
For, while dealing with crime,
He has to find time
To make ends meet which simply will not.

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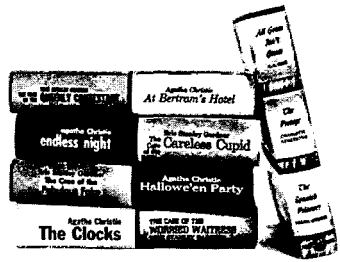

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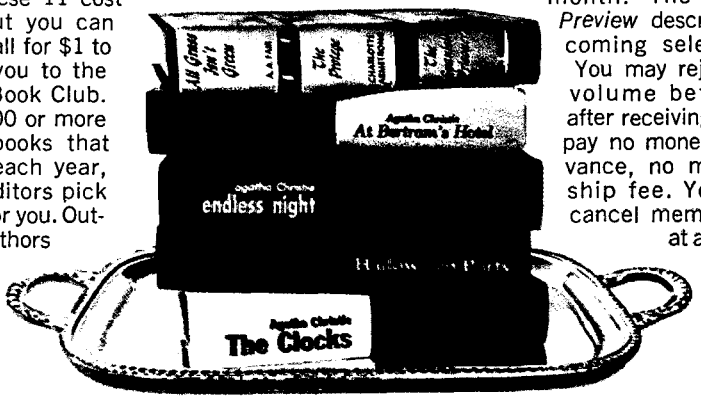

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